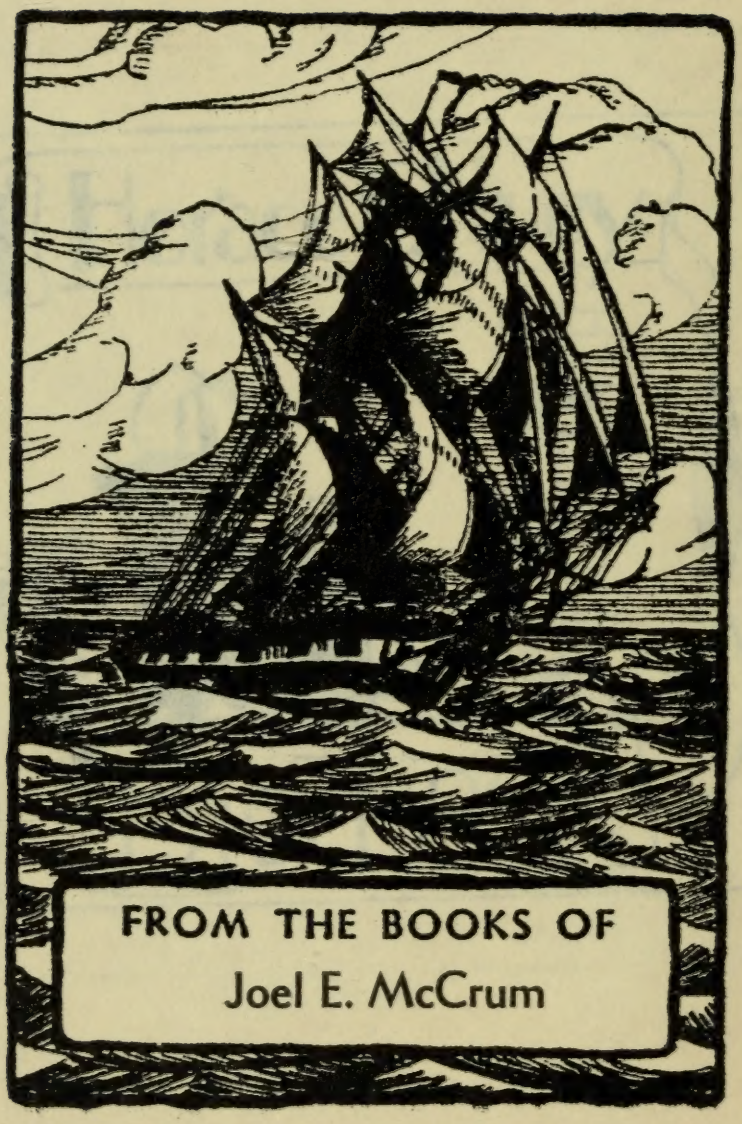
THE DREADFUL NIGHT

BEN AMES WILLIAMS


FROM THE BOOKS OF
Joel E. McCrum

Joel E. McCrum
1-27-50

THE DREADFUL NIGHT

Mr. Williams has also written

EVERED

AUDACITY

SPLENDOR

BLACK PAWL

THRIFTY STOCK

THE SILVER FOREST

THE RATIONAL HIND

IMMORTAL LONGINGS

PUBLISHED BY

E. P. Dutton & Company

THE DREADFUL NIGHT

BY

BEN AMES WILLIAMS

Author of "Splendor," "Immortal Longings," "The Silver Forest," etc.

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

NEW YORK MCMXXVIII

THE DREADFUL NIGHT

THE DREADFUL NIGHT

I

THERE was a public wharf about two miles from the island, where a road came down to the lake shore; and Molly Main took the children and the servants down to this landing immediately after the breakfast work was done. They would go home by train, and she and Paul would have one more night on the island and then drive down tomorrow. She thought, a little wistfully, that the summer was over; and her eyes swept off to the east to rest fondly on the mountains there, and she felt the deep blue of the ruffled water like a caress across her cheek. There was always a measure of melancholy in this last day of summer; always some regret at going home. Once the transition was done, and the first flurry of settling down in familiar surroundings was over, she knew this regret would pass; but the feeling was none the less a keen and poignant one.

The children, she saw, felt it as much as she did. Young Paul, as like his father as a child can be, said over and over on the way down to the landing: "Gosh I wish we didn't have to go! Gosh mother, I wish we could stay till tomorrow with you!" And Margaret, two or three years younger, was as regretful in a less vociferous way. She watched Molly, saw how her mother's eyes rested on the beauty all about them; and she pressed against Molly's elbow and whispered:

"It's awfully pretty, isn't it, mother? Don't you hate to leave it, mother?"

Molly laughed a little, trying to reassure them. "The fun's over for this year," she agreed. "But you'll have next year to look forward to; and you'll be back in school next week, and so many things to do."

"Gosh," young Paul protested. "That's the worst part of it; getting back to school!"

"Oh, I don't think so," Margaret said in a tone of virtuous reproof. "But I do hate to leave the island, though."

"Everyone else has gone home," Molly reminded them. "And it will be getting cold pretty soon; it's already too cold to go in swimming."

"I went in this morning," Paul argued. "It was great. Just as warm!"

Molly laughed, and spoke over her shoulder

to Richard and Lucy, the servants, in the stern seat of the motorboat. "You have the keys, Richard," she reminded the man.

"Yes madame," he assured her.

"You'll have all day tomorrow to get things in shape," she told him. "The floors will need going over; and there'll be dusting. And you can hang some of the curtains if you have time. I've written to order what groceries you'll need. They'll be delivered this afternoon; and ice, too; and the milk tomorrow morning."

"Yes madame," he said again; and she nodded, and looked ahead. They were approaching the landing; and she could see waiting the car that had come to take the servants and the children to the railroad. She swung the boat wide so as to come in straight alongside the wharf; and this brought her into such a position that she could look up the road through the trees. Dill Sockford—Dillaway, but Dill for short—was coming down the road with a rack of milk bottles in his hand and a stranger at his side; she remarked this stranger instinctively, felt a faint amusement at the cap he wore. Then the boat demanded her attention as she checked its way, reversed, and shut off the ignition while Paul jumped out to secure the lines and Richard began the business of unloading luggage. The driver of the car came

to help him; and Dill too. The man with Dill, the stranger, stayed near the car.

Dill—he lived a hundred yards up the road and supplied them with milk through the summer—spoke jocularly to the children, and with a little deprecatory nod by way of greeting, to Molly. "Shipping 'em home, are you?" he asked.

She smiled assent. "Yes. Yes, they're going. Say goodby to Dill, dears, till next summer."

"Guess you won't want any more milk then?" Dill suggested. He was apt thus to anticipate her instructions. He was an amiable man and a helpful one; during the winters he had the island in charge, and at such times as this he did odd jobs there.

"I'll take one bottle," she told him. "The others, too, of course, if you've saved it for us. And Dill, I'll want you to come up this afternoon to help me shut up the house."

"Paul coming tonight, ain't he?" Dill inquired; and she nodded.

"But he won't want to do odd jobs," she explained, smiling a little; and Dill chuckled.

"He ain't one for odd jobs," he agreed. "All right, I figured you'd want me. I'm planning to come."

Molly noticed inattentively that the stranger, the man with the amusing cap, had gone back

up the road. Then Richard, the man servant, said deferentially: "Was there anything else, madame?"

Molly shook her head; and she went along with the children toward the waiting car. Paul tried one last plea. "Gosh I wish I could stay till tomorrow, mother!"

"Dad and I will have so much luggage in the car," she explained. "You'd best go along on the train, dear. Goodby!" She kissed them; stood waving to them as the car drew away; called at the last moment: "See you tomorrow night, dears!" And watched their small hands waving from each side of the car till it passed the first angle in the narrow road and disappeared. She stood a moment longer, wistfulness shadowing her eyes once more, till Dill spoke at her elbow.

"Want me to start her for you?" he asked.

Molly laughed then, and shook her head. "No," she told him. "she knows me." And they went out toward the boat together, and she got into the engine pit, and reached across to set spark and ignition and throttle, and then bent to the fly-wheel. Dill was talking amiably, telling her the news of the lake; and she listened inattentively. She had long since acquired the art of appearing to listen to uninteresting people, while at the same time her own thoughts were

free. But she hesitated to start the engine now so long as he kept on talking; so she waited, her hand upon the wheel. Her idle thoughts returned to the man who had come down with Dill, then gone away again; and she asked Dill who he was.

"Wanted to be set over to the Club island," Dill explained. "I said I didn't know as I had time."

"You'll come right after dinner, then?" she reminded him.

"I'll be there or thereabouts," he agreed, grinning; and she nodded, and turned the fly-wheel with that sharp snap which it required. The engine caught and ran; and she climbed into the driving seat and nodded to Dill and he let go the lines. As she backed into open water she looked at him again and his mouth was still moving; so she knew he was talking even now. She smothered a smile and nodded as though to agree with what he said; and then she swung the boat and started up the lake toward the island again.

The day had begun with a suggestion of frost in the air; but already the sun was warmer and the white clouds were heavy overhead. The air had that peculiar clarity which the latter months of summer and the early fall always bring; she thought she could distinguish individual trees on the mountains miles away, and the fire tower

stood up gaunt and distinct against the sky. As she passed through a channel between the mainland and a group of little islands, the wind in her face freshened, and a little whip of spray wet her cheek, so she turned the bow of the boat to meet the waves more fairly. There were summer places on the mainland at her left, now in most instances deserted; she studied them as she passed by, noting the closed doors of the boathouses, feeling a faint chill at their loneliness. Here lived the Days, where she and Paul so often came to play tennis; and there was the Tunney place; and on the island to her right the Fisher establishment. She left the channel behind and came into more open water; and she looked across to the Club island to the east, and to Big Dog and Little Dog beyond. She and Paul had gone over to Little Dog a good many times this summer. Capello, Adah Capello, the great soprano, had taken it for the season; and the famous woman had displayed a surprising desire to be friendly, calling upon her neighbors, inviting them to her home. Molly had been inclined to like her, puzzled and attracted by the faint and exotic atmosphere which hung about her. Capello had always been to the public in some sort a mystery. An Italian by birth as well as by musical education, she had made her début now full twenty years

ago; and since then she had never revisited her native land. When her professional associates, as the opera season ended, took passage for the Riviera or the Nile, she bade them goodby and chose to spend her own vacation season in some remote but populous summer colony in the United States. "I am American," she liked to say, explaining this whim. "Why should I work so hard here, and make so much money, and then go and spend it some other place. No, I am American, and I stay here."

So this summer she had lived on Little Dog, where the big place built a dozen years before by Darnley had been these last two seasons since Darnley's wife died, vacant and unused. Molly liked her almost as much as Paul did; and Paul liked her very much indeed, found her stimulating and alive and colorful. It was from her he had bought Molly's emerald.

Molly, holding the motorboat into the wind, came into the lee of their own island and swung to the west to skirt its shores toward the landing cove. Thinking of Capello, she remembered idly the impression she had sometimes had that the woman was nervous and fearful; but the thought was only a passing one. The big house came in sight, and she was reminded by a glimpse of the curtains at the window of the guest room

that they must be renewed next year, might as well be destroyed now. "I must have Dill collect a lot of things like that," she told herself. "He can pile them up somewhere, and then when the lake freezes he can take them out on the ice and burn them." She turned in toward the boathouses and ran the boat into its slip and stopped the engine and climbed out to drop an accustomed clove hitch over one of the uprights which held the boat lifters. There were two slips in this boathouse, one in that adjoining; but the other slips were vacant. Paul had run the bigger boats down to be stored for the winter; only this little jogabout would be left here, needing only to be lowered into the water in the spring to be ready for use. She and Paul sometimes came up for an early week-end in one of the small cabins; and it was convenient at such times to have a boat at hand.

She left the boathouse; and at once felt, almost palpable, the silence of the island. It is true that a red squirrel chirred in an oak tree up behind the servants' quarters; and two or three crows were quarrelling in the hemlock growth to the north. But the silence was the more emphatic by reason of their outcries, as though pointed by this contrast. It was the first time Molly had ever been absolutely alone here; and it had not occurred to

her that the experience might be disturbing. Paul would be here a little after dark, coming on the six fifty-two train; and she had a great many things to do before he came. But though these tasks waited for her hands, she stood still for a moment, outside the boathouse, listening to this curious silence; theirs was the only place on the island, and three-quarters of a mile of open water lay between her and the nearest mainland. She could not be sure that there was another human being nearer than Dill Sockford, two miles or so away; and she was for a little almost inclined to tremble at the thought, wondering what she would do if, for instance, she fell off a chair and sprained her ankle while taking down the curtains from their rods. Then, north of the island, she heard a motorboat; and it came toward her, popping reassuringly; and she went along the path through the trees toward the big house, waving a hand to the lone man in the boat as he passed by.

This island where she and Paul and the children spent the summer was of considerable extent. They called it thirty acres; but it may have been a little more. Wooded throughout, it rose to a height of perhaps fifty feet above the lake; and beneath the carpet of dead leaves and needles fallen through generations from the trees, there

was only a heap of tumbled boulders, frost shattered and carved into eccentric shapes and forms. Some one, some wealthy man, had made it once his plaything. There were everywhere indications that he had spent money regardlessly, on every passing whim. There was a road across the island, cleared of boulders, sufficient for rough hauling; and there was a path around its circumference, smooth and easy underfoot. The boathouses were in a cove in the island's western flank; and on the rocky point to the north a little cabin stood. There was another cabin a hundred yards beyond, somewhat removed from the water. The servants' quarters were in two small buildings in the hollow below the water tower, behind the boathouses; the tennis court lay south of the big house; and the house itself, half hidden among the trees which surrounded it, was big enough for a dozen people to lose themselves. Molly and Paul often laughed at the ridiculous fact that they had it all to themselves; there was so much room; twenty might have lived here as comfortably as two, and still had space to spare. When the rich man tired of his plaything, he was ready to sell it at any figure at all; and ten times what Paul had paid would not have been sufficient to reproduce it in some other location.

When Molly came into the house this morning,

she felt a faint chill in the air, damp and depressing; the chill of night not yet wholly dissipated by the sun. In the centre of the enormous living-room a tremendous chimney rose two stories to the roof; a grotesque affair fashioned from stones chosen for their eccentric shapes, so that it was as though a hundred gargoyles had been piled one upon another. There was a fireplace on each side of this chimney; and Molly kindled a fire in one and then in the other, and watched the leaping flames, and stood before them till their warmth drove back the dampness and the chill a little. She had expected to be, this morning, extremely energetic; there were so many things to do. But now that the children and the servants were gone, a certain indolence possessed her. It was pleasant to stand here in the heat of the fire and let her idle thoughts drift aimlessly. The fire burned high, feeding on the fat pine, the flames yellow as gold. Its heat at last repelled her; she turned aside and began in a dreamy abstraction to take down the curtains and fold them and stow them in the great window seats; and she stuffed the brightly colored pillows which littered the seats, in atop the curtains; and then reversed the seat cushions so that their gay covers might not suffer from the weather. These activities might have been expected to win her to a more ener-

getic mood; but by and by, when she took a rug out on the south veranda to sweep it, the little path leading along the shore attracted her eye, and wooed her away. Sun, flecking through the leaves, dappled the path; and as the birches swayed, the shadows moved enticingly to and fro, inviting her to come and play among them. Molly went a little way, and paused, and went on again; and at last with a certain resolution she decided to walk around the island. There was time enough for the chores she had to do.

On the east side of the island there was a channel, not wide, with two or three smaller islands beyond. No one, at this season, dwelt upon them; and Molly felt their desolation. But halfway through the path along the channel she heard the touch of paddle against gunwale, and stopped on a jut of rock to look along the way, and saw a girl coming toward her, in a canoe. The canoe was bright red; and the girl wore a bathing suit which had once been red but now was merely rusty. Her short, flax-colored hair had been burned red by the sun; and her arms and legs, bare, were red as copper, or as the lights that lurk behind the sheen of gold. Molly knew her; Nell Harmon, whose family lived in summer at the landing near Dill Sockford's place; and she called a greeting, with a lifted hand.

The girl raised her paddle in response, and with a swirl swung the bow of the canoe toward where Molly stood. "Hello," she said. "Thought you were going down today?"

"I sent the children today," Molly told her, and laughed a little. "I'm supposed to be closing up the house; but I couldn't stay indoors. Paul's coming tonight, and we'll drive down tomorrow."

"It is wonderful, isn't it," the girl assented. "I couldn't stay in, either."

Molly looked at her and shivered. "I should think you'd be frozen. And you haven't even gooseflesh on your arms."

Nell laughed softly. "I'm out this way so much. I love it."

"You're like an Indian," Molly agreed. "So brown! Don't you burn at all?"

The girl shook her head, stirred the water with her paddle. "Who was the man on the upper end of the island?" she asked idly.

Molly looked her surprise. "Why, there's nobody here but me."

"I saw him go away as I came along," Nell explained. "I came up the other side, and he was just going off. In a motorboat. I didn't really see him land; but I thought he'd been ashore."

"Not likely anyone would land there," Molly reminded her.

"I suppose not," Nell agreed, and her paddle moved and the canoe slid away. "'Bye," she called. "See you this winter in town."

Molly nodded, spoke a parting word; and she watched the canoe move steadily southward, the girl's arms rhythmic and graceful as they passed through the movements of the long stroke. But when, continuing her way, she came to the north end of the island she remembered what Nell had said, and looked along the shore, for any sign that someone had landed here. There was a ledge running well off shore; approach by motor-boat was impracticable; and she decided that Nell had simply seen a boat emerge from the channel. Molly had by this time recovered from her uneasiness at the solitude; she thought no more of this passerby.

When she had completed the circuit of the island she did not at once go indoors. There was, in front of the big house and projecting somewhat into the lake, a sort of mole, rock-walled and floored with sand; and in its centre above a concrete basin full of water stood the image of a boy grappling with a goose. By turning a cock under the sill of the house, this goose could be made to spit a fine stream; the image became a fountain. Molly stood here for a little, bathing in the sun; and she turned on the fountain and

watched its play. The little morning breeze had died; the day was very still, as though the hush of evening were already fallen. Somewhere across on the mainland a dog barked, a curious, deep bay like the note of some gigantic hound. The sound came gently to her ears; yet there was menace in it. She had a momentary thought that the dog must be chasing some wild thing, and shivered faintly.

In the house at last she decided to leave the living room and the rest of the ground floor for attention later; and she went upstairs to put to rights the rooms where the children had lived during the summer; and as she did this work she smiled now and then at the disorderly traces of their occupancy. In her own room later, she put some things into her open trunk, now almost full; and she packed a bag. In the process of collecting things from her dresser she came upon the little lacquer box in which she kept the emerald Paul had bought for her; and she opened the box to look at the stone, crossed to a window to study it, finding in it the same rich and leaping pleasure which she always derived from its inspection.

It was not large; not so large, for instance, as the diamond in the engagement ring which Paul had given her years before. Nor was it the same

shape; for where the diamond was round, the emerald was cut four square, and lay like a green pool, unfathomably deep, upon its soft bed in the tiny lacquer box. She remembered the night she had first seen it. She and Paul were at Little Dog; they had dined with Capello there; and Raleigh was with them. Raleigh was Paul's friend, and he had won some eminence in his profession as an expert on precious stones. He and Capello talked of these matters, while she and Paul listened, conscious of their own ignorance, yet curiously enthralled. Raleigh spoke more than once of the singer's own jewels, famous and familiar; but she only said:

"They are in the bank! I wish I might show them to you. I have always had the love of such things; but one cannot bring them to these places, so remote and far."

The talk had turned at last upon emeralds; and Molly was surprised and interested to discover in the other woman, when these stones were mentioned, a curious reticence, something like a hint of nervousness, of fear. She tried to catch Raleigh's eye, to warn him that the subject seemed distasteful to their hostess; but he was blind to her warning, talked on so eloquently that Capello said at last with a faint sigh:

"Yes it is so; it is that way with emeralds!

They have always been something different to me. From the first I have loved them."

Raleigh nodded, spoke some further word; and suddenly with a curious abruptness, Capello had risen from her chair.

"Wait," she said. "I have one I will show you. One that I do not ever wear; but it is here."

She left the room; and Raleigh explained in a somewhat lowered tone: "I wanted her to do that. I've heard of this emerald. There's a tale about it. They say it's worth seeing. . . ." He could not, he confessed, remember the tale. "It just occurred to me a few minutes ago," he confessed, "that I'd heard something about the Capello emerald, somewhere. . . ."

When the stone was revealed to them, even Molly and Paul felt its beauty; but while they were intoxicated, Raleigh, examining it with an attentive eye, was also deeply respectful. He said at last: "But this is the finest emerald I have ever seen."

"The finest?" Molly cried.

"I don't mean the largest, of course," he told her. "Nothing fabulous. But it is as near perfect as an emerald can be." He added, seeing her interest: "You know a flawless emerald is almost unknown." He smiled faintly. "I've always had a kindness in my heart for the stone," he ex-

plained. "There's something about an emerald which appeals to me."

"Are they very valuable?" Molly asked.

He nodded. "Yes. Yes; they're more valuable than diamonds. Definitely. In the smaller stones, the emerald is worth say half again as much; but when you get a larger one, the value mounts at a tremendous ratio. I suppose a flawless four carat emerald would be priceless; just a question of what the buyer would pay. Yet a good diamond of that size wouldn't be worth any exorbitant figure."

"Where do they come from?" Paul inquired.

"Well," Raleigh expounded, "the oldest emerald mines were probably in Egypt. They were lost for a while, and then they were found again, a hundred years or so ago; but they haven't turned up many good stones there. You find them in this country, sometimes. There's one crystal in the National Museum, from North Carolina, that weighs around 1200 carats. That's over half a pound, say. That's the largest ever found in the United States, I think." He added, smiling again, "You know, there were a lot of old superstitions about them. The ancients used to think it was good for tired eyes to look at an emerald. 'A sight for sore eyes,' you might say. Then there was another notion that one look at an

emerald would turn a snake blind. And it was a charm against evil spirits, and epilepsy, and things of that sort. A good luck stone, or people thought so, at least."

Capello spoke abruptly, with a little shudder in her voice. "I have stones like that," she said. "But this one, I have always felt something baleful in it, like an angry eye watching me. Like a jealous eye; a green, jealous eye. I have thought sometimes of being rid of it." She added softly, as though to herself: "If I dared do so."

There was a momentary silence, a little awkward, then Paul said with a laugh: "Well, if you ever get that feeling, let me know. I'd like to own that stone myself." He added: "If I could find the money."

The great soprano made a curious gesture. "I did not buy it," she said. "If I wished to sell, the price would be of small account." She extended her hand, and Raleigh returned it to her, and she put it jealously away again. But while she was absent from the room, Paul asked Raleigh:

"What's it worth, old man?"

Raleigh moved his shoulders. "Well, it's beautiful," he said. "And nearly perfect. If you bought it in the ordinary way, probably three thousand dollars."

Paul laughed. "Too steep for me," he com-

mented. But the matter stayed in his mind, as Molly, that night and afterward, perceived. So she was not wholly surprised when he came to her one day to ask: "Molly, would you like that emerald?"

"Not at that price," she told him. "It's too much to—put into a little piece of green stone."

"I can get it for less than two thousand," he said soberly. Paul's New England thrift always found it difficult to resist a bargain; and Molly smiled in understanding. He added: "She—seems to have a curious grudge against the stone. I think the feeling is growing on her. If I waited, she'd probably give it to me. I think I'll buy it from her, Molly."

And so in the end the transaction had taken place. Last week-end Paul had brought it home to her, in this little box in which she had first seen it. He wished to take it to town with him, when he went down Monday morning; but Molly would not let it go. "I want to live with it," she had said. "Leave it with me here. No one will know."

"Safe enough," he agreed. "She won't say anything about it; and no one else knows but Raleigh. But keep it out of sight, Hon! Or you'll have someone on its trail."

So all this week Molly had kept it hidden away,

showing it not even to the children, finding now and then a moment apart in which to gaze upon it and to feel again that rich and intoxicating thrill its deep beauty always gave. . . . She had not thus far been at all nervous about it; she was not a nervous woman. That moment of uneasiness when this morning she first realized the solitude on the island had been for her an extraordinary experience; yet curiously now as she put the stone away, that vague uneasiness returned. She remembered that Capello had seemed afraid to keep it, yet afraid to be rid of it too; and Molly wondered why.

II

WHEN by and by she had put the emerald away Molly began to be hungry, and she went down stairs and turned toward the kitchen. Little tasks caught her eye on the way distracting and delaying her. In the great living-room she picked up young Paul's oilskins and hung them in the closet under the north stair; in the billiard room, running the width of the big house, where they sometimes danced in the evening, she stopped to turn over the cushions on the broad seats around the walls. The dining room was separated from the billiard room only by a difference in floor level and a low banister; and she paused here to look at the steins and pieces of old china on the plate rail around the wall and thought she would take them down next summer. They spoiled, she decided, the pleasing line of the low wide arch of the ceiling. She stood a moment, finger pressing against her cheek, considering this; and she even got a chair and took down one of the plates and laid it on the table. She must ask Paul, tonight or in the morning, what he thought about the change. The small problem

engrossed her, filling her thoughts, excluding every other consideration; and when presently she went into the kitchen she had forgotten the emerald, was quite at ease again.

The pantry was almost bare; she had planned to use up most of the perishable foodstuffs before closing the house for the winter. But there was bread and butter, and milk and eggs, and beans, and soup in cans; and she opened a can of soup—Richard had left a good coal fire in the big stove—and made coffee, and toasted a slice or two of bread. There was a skylight in the roof above the kitchen, with gear for opening its sections to permit ventilation; and the sun, now high, struck down through the glass and laid a yellow rectangle against the wall and the windows at her right hand. She had always loved this kitchen, it was so airy and so bright and light and clean. . . . When she was done, she washed her few dishes, and took the soup can out to the receptacle provided behind the kitchen door. This receiver, a barrel, covered to exclude flies, was set against the end of the long, bold-faced ledge which began at the rear corner of the house and ran south. Molly was this day acutely sensitive to many small impressions, her imagination quickening at stimuli which—when others were about—had no effect at all. Thus now this ledge

caught her eye; and she went along its face a little way to where some of the seams had been filled with cement; and she touched this cement with her fingers, assuring herself that it was solid and sound. The cement closed a niche hollowed in the face of the ledge a good many years before, to contain the ashes of the first man who had lived here upon the island. Molly and Paul knew the story and liked to remember it. This other man—he had lived here alone, summer upon summer—was a jovial soul, for all his solitary ways. Rapidan, his name was; and as Molly and Paul heard the tale, his birthday fell upon a date in late August. On that date they were always used to drink a toast to him. . . . Sometimes visitors asked Molly: "Doesn't it bother you, knowing he's there? I should think you'd feel haunted?"

Molly always laughed at this. "I like it," she declared. "He was a fine old fellow. I like having him around; like to imagine he's enjoying it here as much as we do. . . ."

There was something almost like a caress in the way she touched the cement which sealed his niche in the ledge today; she thought, smiling a little: "You never felt lonely here, did you? It never bothered you."

Not till she had returned to the kitchen did

she realize that this was a confession on her part that her own uneasiness still persisted; that the silence and the solitude were fretting at her nerves. She tried to laugh the feeling away; but she was nevertheless conscious of a vast relief when a little before two o'clock she saw, coming up the lake, Dill Sockford's eccentric little motor-boat; and she went out on the mole before the house to wave a greeting to him as he swung into the cove. When he came up the path to the house, she was busy on the upper floor; and she called to him: "Come up here, Dill. I need you here."

The little man joined her a moment later, in her room; and he smiled in characteristic fashion, not so much with his lips which had always a whimsical twist, as with his eyes in which there was apt to dwell a friendly, kindly light. "Been busy, ain't you?" he commented. "Don't see as there's much of anything for me to do."

"I want to get into the attic, Dill," she told him. "There is an attic. There's a window into it from the roof over the kitchen and Paul climbed up there once; and he says there are a lot of old things stowed away up there. But we've never bothered to hunt up the trapdoor. I'd like to go up there and see what there is, and clean it up a bit, and throw a lot of things away."

He raised his eyes to the ceiling of the room

in which they stood; a ceiling made of narrow matched boards, smoothly set and painted gray. "I never see any trap door," he replied. "And I been around here quite a lot, last four—five years."

"There must be one," she insisted.

"Sure, must be one," he agreed. "Well, we'll look around."

She suggested that it was probably in the narrow hall which led from the living-room toward the rear of the house, on the second floor; but they could find no suggestion of a trap door in the ceiling there. So at her urgency they examined the ceilings of the closets in some of the rooms. The fact that they discovered no opening anywhere piqued her, whetted her curiosity; and she prosecuted the search beyond all reason, giving over the effort at last in an amused bewilderment.

"It's funny, isn't it, Dill?" she exclaimed.

" 'Tis kind of queer," he agreed.

"I'd like to see what's up there," she declared. "I hate a mystery."

"Probably that's where they kept the family skeletons," he suggested, and chuckled. "Probably there's some kind of a secret door."

"Paul didn't see any skeletons," she reminded him idly; and was a little surprised to discover

that she was shivering. She laughed at herself. "It's funny," she declared. "As long as I thought I could go up there any time, I didn't mind a bit; but it bothers me now."

"Let well enough alone," he advised. "Guess if you ain't had to get up there before now, you don't have to now."

"And we've plenty to do without wasting any more time," she agreed. "You were late, weren't you?"

"Boat acted a mite cranky," he confessed. "I had to monkey with her. And then I was held up a spell. Fellow come along and wanted I should carry him over to Little Dog."

They were stripping the beds in the children's rooms, putting away blankets, tumbling linen ready for the laundry. "To see Madame Capello?" she asked.

He nodded. "Name of Newbert," he explained. "Said he was a reporter. Come up to get some kind of a story for his Sunday paper. He'd figured on getting someone to carry him over; and he tried to talk me into it. He was a nice, common man, too."

Molly smiled, imagining the conversation. Dill was independent, not used to being urged or hurried.

"Nell Harmon come along about that time,"

he added. "And he got talking to her. You'd think they'd knowed each other ten years, but I don't reckon she ever seen him before. She had that bathing suit on; and he kind of laughed at her; but it didn't seem to bother her none."

"She was up here this morning," Molly commented. "In her canoe. I should think she'd freeze."

"Never wears anything else, much," he agreed. "She was always that way, time she was a baby here. I can remember when she weren't so high." He indicated a height of no importance at all.

"She does swim beautifully," Molly assented. "Carry those sheets down into the billiard room, Dill. I'm gathering all the laundry there. And bring the little step ladder when you come back. I want to take down the curtains."

"She told him the Bafford boy would take him over in that boat of his," Dill explained, as he moved away. "So I guess he walked down to her place with her. The Bafford's is the next beyond."

"And bring the box of keys," Molly added. "Someone has locked the closet door in Paul's room. I'd like to get it open if I can."

He came back after a little, and they tried every available key without success. Young Paul must have locked the door; doubtless had stored

some of his small treasures here. "And he'd probably take the key with him, the imp," she laughed. "He loves doing mysterious things."

"Maybe the trap door to the attic's in there," Dill suggested.

"I've a mind to break the door down," Molly declared, eyeing it resentfully. "I always hated locks."

"Take a screw driver and pry her open all right," Dill told her; and she said quickly:

"Go ahead, Dill. Do it."

He was as good as his word, and a moment later he had sprung the door open and swung it wide. Inside, as Molly had expected, she found young Paul's collection of motor boats and small sailing craft all stowed away; and she laughed over them, tenderly; but there was no trapdoor in this ceiling; the affair of the attic remained as much a puzzle as before.

They began to take down hangings from the windows; and they picked up the rugs from the floors and took them out on the front balcony to sweep and beat. The wind was freshening again; the surface of the lake was broken by little shadows of darker blue as gusts swept here and there. And on this wind Molly heard again the baying of a dog, somewhere behind them, it seemed to her; a far, booming note.

"I heard that dog this morning," she told Dill. "But it seemed to be over on the mainland. It sounds behind us, now. Over toward Little Dog."

"Dog's bark'll carry queer, some days," he reminded her; and then he chuckled. "Hear about the wolf, been around lately?" he asked.

She looked at him in surprise. "Wolf?" she echoed.

"Two or three have seen it," he told her, smiling as though amused at the tale. "You can't tell them it's nothing but a dog. Guess it ain't any dog around here, anyways. Big, gray brute, with pointed ears and a kind of bushy tail; and it stays in the woods, and gets out of sight quick."

Molly laughed. "Sounds like a police dog," she suggested; and he assented.

"Guess so," he agreed. "But there's women scared of it. It ain't harmed anybody; only Dave Riggs, he met up with it in the wood road that comes down to the camps over there on the Neck. . . ." He jerked a thumb behind them, toward the northeast. "And he said the thing snarled at him and never give an inch of ground, and he kind of circled around it and went on by."

They heard again that distant baying; and Molly said softly: "Hear! Maybe that's it, now. Maybe it got lost from some car. Poor thing. It's probably scared to death. . . . Running wild."

They were done with the rugs, and took them in again and stored them away. It was by this time four o'clock; and Molly remembered the little motor boat which must be lifted out of water, and told Dill to go and do that. "Paul won't want to bother with it tomorrow," she explained. "We'll have enough to do. And you can come up and get us and the trunks and bags."

He nodded assent and left her and went down the path toward the boathouses; and she moved to and fro about her tasks for a time. The sun drew low above the hills across the lake; and now and then she paused by a window to watch the deepening colors there. The work in the house approached completion; so many things could not be done till tomorrow, till she and Paul were through with their beds and with their room and with the kitchen. She was not so zealous as she had been, found her thoughts inclined to wander. By and by she took out the little box containing the emerald again, and looked at the stone for a while with a quiet pleasure; and when she put it away, it occurred to her to hide it. The small mystification seemed to her amusing; she concealed it in Paul's fishing tackle box, in the closet, and felt that it was there more secure. Paul had in the box a twenty-two calibre target pistol; an automatic, its loaded clips beside it. Molly

handled this weapon gingerly; she had an ancient distrust for firearms of every kind.

Afterward she went down to the boathouses to watch Dill. He had the lifters half raised, so that already they bore the weight of the boat; and he was pumping out the bilge.

"Take some weight off her bottom," he explained. "She's old, and rotten probably."

She stood watching; and afterward, when he resumed the business of getting the boat out of water, inserting a long lever under the bolt in each one of the lifters by turn, she helped him by withdrawing the pegs and thrusting them into other holes lower down, to catch and hold his gains. Thus inch by inch they raised the little craft till it hung secure above the water, its wet bottom dripping.

"She'll winter there all right," said Dill.

"Paul wants you to fix up the wharf some this winter," she told him. "I expect you'd better look and see what lumber you'll need, so he can order it for you."

"Have to go along pretty quick now and do my chores," he explained; nevertheless they moved through the boathouse and out along the wharf together. There were clouds banked in the west, for the moment obscuring the sun, drawing before it a rich and gorgeous veil

through which its beauty pulsed and burned; and Molly looked at this tremendous spectacle with still and dreaming eyes. But Dill was of more practical mind.

"Going to blow some," he commented. "By the looks of it."

She was inattentive; and he turned back to examine the rotten planking here and there, went down on his knees to inspect the crib work beneath the wharf. She stayed where she was, thoughtful and abstracted, watching the great clouds shift, the colors deepen and pale again; and at length, when his inspection was concluded, he came back to her side.

"Guess I'd better go along," he announced; and she roused herself with a faint effort, nodding.

"All right," she agreed; and added: "But come up in the morning, won't you? Paul will want to talk to you about the ice and the wood."

"I'll come when I get my chores done," he assented; and he added: "Got to go along now and milk the cows. I'm going to sell a couple of 'em pretty soon. Got no use for the milk with you folks all gone."

"Pretty quiet for you in the winter, isn't it," she said sympathetically.

"We'll go up town to live," he reminded her.

"Had a right nice place last winter. Four rooms, right in the middle of town, on the main street, and the front room looked both ways so you could set and see everything that went on without going out doors at all."

"That was nice, wasn't it!" she agreed.

He was priming the engine in his boat. "Want to come down and have supper with us?" he asked. "What time Paul get here? I can bring you back up."

"I'll paddle down," she replied. "He'll be here about seven o'clock and he likes to paddle at night, and we'll eat after we get back here."

He nodded. "All right," he agreed, and whirled the flywheel, and repeated the operation. The engine caught and stopped, caught and stopped, caught at last and ran, its uproar barring any further word between them. Dill backed out into the open lake, his boat and himself silhouetted darkly against the glow upon the water; and he turned and chugged away while Molly followed the winding path back to the house.

It was growing cooler, and she sought a sweater and went out on the mole to watch the light fail. She stayed there a long time, dreaming; but when the glow had faded to a dull red like a dying ember, she roused herself from her reverie, and found she was shivering a little, and

went indoors. In the ghostly light of dusk the furniture assumed strange shapes, seemed at first glance to move as though wishful to evade her eye; and she stood and watched it for a moment, smiling faintly at her own fancy, and then turned on the shaded light on the table before the fireplace, and knelt before the hearth and kindled another fire on the still-warm ashes there, and found a book and read for a little while. The great house was very still, so still that now and then she caught herself listening for something which it seemed she could almost hear; but all she could hear was the whispering laughter of the little waves against the stonework of the mole.

After a time the book fell idle in her lap and she wondered how soon Paul would be here, and looked at her watch. In less than an hour now, if his train were on time. She decided to find out about this, and went back through the billiard room, turning on lights before her as she went, and to the closet where the telephone was housed. But she could get no answer from the operator; and it occurred to her that she had had no calls this day. They must, she decided, have disconnected the telephone. She knew Paul had written them, a week before, instructions to do so tomorrow; decided they had acted a day ahead of time. This seemed to her to increase her iso-

lation; and a little later, though it was not yet time to do so, she went down to the boathouses and chose a canoe and slid it into the water and began the two mile paddle to the landing. The wind was still light, and it pressed upon her back, helping her progress; she went indolently, hurrying not at all, across the open water toward the channel between the mainland and the Fisher's island, and through this channel where red and black buoys marked the safe course, and on toward the landing beyond.

Once, looking back, she found that she could see the light in the living room of the big house; she had left it burning there, and the thought that it burned in an empty house made her shiver again. She said to herself, roused at last to fight this feeling:

"Don't be absurd, Molly. You'll be imagining all sorts of things if you keep on. There's not a thing to be afraid of."

Nevertheless, she confessed in her secret heart, it was reassuring to know that in a little while now Paul would be here; that she would no longer be alone.

III

IT must have been toward a quarter past six when Molly started to paddle from the island to the landing; may have been as late as ten minutes of seven when she arrived there. The landing was located in the waist of a considerable cove, hemmed on the north by a point of land with islands at its tip; and when she came into the lee of these islands, it was as though the light wind ceased and the hush of night fell all around her. In this abrupt silence, she heard, off to the westward, the whistle of a train; the express to Boston, which would meet and pass Paul's train at Tacoma, some fifteen miles southerly. Her heart leaped at the thought that he was so near.

Off across the lake somewhere, invisible, she heard a motorboat; and once she caught the sound of creaking rowlocks through the whispering stir of the wind. To the south she saw the lights of another motorboat coming up the lake at an angle, bearing easterly. But these were the only craft whose presence she detected. In the cottages here and there along the shore she saw only an

occasional light; but most of them were already abandoned, closed for the winter. The season was late September, and only the hardiest tarried now.

Her canoe glided alongside the wharf at the landing; and since the wind could not strike it here, she made no attempt to beach it or draw it out of water, simply looped the painter over one of the mooring cleats provided. Paul would, she knew, expect to find her waiting at Dill Sockford's house, a little up the road; and she turned that way, her footsteps soundless in the sandy road. A rod or two from the water, behind the first cottage, another road came in from the south; and she saw a figure moving there, and hesitated, and called softly in recognition:

"Is that you, Nell?"

The girl answered. "Yes. Molly?"

"I came down to meet Paul," Molly explained. "Are you going up to Dill's, too?"

Nell assented, filling in beside the older woman. "We haven't any telephone," she explained. "And I want to use Dill's." She laughed a little. "I've a man on my hands," she added. "Marooned over on Little Dog, I'm afraid. I may have to go after him."

Molly smiled. "Dill told me," she agreed. "You mean the newspaper man?"

"Trust Dill," Nell commented whimsically. "Yes. I finally had to take him over. But I expected the Bafford boy would go after him. Now his boat won't start; and I'm going to telephone and see if there's a boat there to bring him back."

They came to Dill's house as she spoke, and stepped into the screened veranda. The living-room within was lighted, and the kitchen beyond; and Molly opened the door without knocking and called:

"Hello, Mrs. Sockford."

Dill's wife, as small as Dill himself, and with a curious faint and habitual worry in her eyes, came to the kitchen door, drying her hands on a towel.

"Come right in, Mrs. Main," she invited. "Dill's milking, but he'll be done in a minute. Good evening, Nell."

"I wanted to use your telephone," Nell explained. "The line isn't busy, is it?"

"It hasn't rung for a spell," Mrs. Sockford assured her. "I guess you can get them all right." She was always rather inclined to expect the worst. "Paul coming tonight, ain't he?" she asked Molly; and Molly followed her into the kitchen as Nell went toward the telephone in the other room. "Dill said you looked for him."

"He's due almost any time," Molly agreed,

her voice warming at the thought. "Don't let me bother you," she added, as Mrs. Sockford looked uncertainly at the table set for two, and at the stove. "Go right ahead."

"Won't you set up and eat?" Mrs. Sockford asked, and seemed relieved when Molly negatived this. "Well, I don't know as we've anything you'd like," the little woman confessed.

Dill came in with a full pail in either hand and set the separator running, turning the handle at increasing speed, while the gears droned crescendo. And he smiled at Molly, talking as he worked. "Hear about the excitement around here?" he asked. "While I was up to the island this afternoon?"

Molly shook her head, smiling inattentively, thinking about Paul; and he explained. "Guess that op'ry singer over at Little Dog has had trouble with her help," he told her. "Got a couple men working for her there, cooking and waiting on table; and they come in and landed here long 'bout quarter past one. They go to town regular, once a week; but there's a girl works out there, colored she is, and she never does come in. But she come in today."

Nell came through the door from the other room and heard what he said; and she confirmed it.

"We saw her as we went over there," she agreed. "Rowing a boat, wasn't she?"

"All I hear she was rowing fast, too," Dill assured them. "Come bumping into the wharf and jumped out with a bag in her hand like she was good and mad, and never tied the boat at all. It went loose, and it went ashore down at Bafford's and they brought it back a little while ago. The girl, she took out up the road, pretty near running. I guess her and the woman had a fight all right."

Molly's attention had been caught at last; she said, her brow furrowed a little: "But she was devoted to Madame Capello. I've seen her there."

"All I hear," Dill insisted, "nobody could get along with that woman very long."

"She's charming," Molly urged. "A wonderful woman." She looked at Nell. "Did you get them?" she asked.

Nell shook her head. "There isn't any telephone on Little Dog," she replied. "I didn't know that."

"Oh, of course," Molly agreed. "I remember, Madame Capello had it disconnected two or three weeks ago, because so many people kept calling her up from Boston or New York, and she wanted to be let alone. I might have told you."

"Hear you finally had to carry that reporter

over there," Dill said to Nell, chuckling as though at some hidden jest.

Nell nodded. "That boat the Bafford boy is always tinkering wouldn't run, of course."

"Got along pretty well with him, didn't you?" Dill suggested, with the privilege of long acquaintance; and Nell caught Molly's eye and winked faintly, and agreed.

"Don't you think he's a nice young man?" she asked.

"Looks all right," Dill agreed.

"I found him charming," Nell declared, in a warm, slow drawl which made Molly want to laugh, and which evidently caused Dill some faint embarrassment. "That's the worst of living up here next door to you all summer, Dill," she added. "I never see any really charming men."

"His name," said Mrs. Sockford definitely, "his name's Newbert. He's a reporter on the *Boston Star,* and he come up here to write a piece for the paper about Madame Capello. It's going to be in the Sunday paper, and there'll be pictures. James Newbert, his name is."

"He told me to call him Jim," Nell said in a droll tone; and Dill cackled aloud and Molly smiled.

"Guess that wa'n't all he told you," he declared. "I see you and him a-going off together.

Looked to me like you set your cap for him right away."

"I've got to get in practice," Nell reminded him. "I'll be back in town in another two weeks."

"He ain't married," said Mrs. Sockford. "He lives with his mother and she takes care of him."

"Paddled him over, did you?" Dill commented, still chuckling at Nell; and Nell said:

"No indeed! He paddled me over. I just paddled the canoe back."

"Did you land with him?" Molly asked Nell. "See Madame Capello?" And Nell shook her head.

"No; no, I just had on a bathing suit; I left him on the wharf. I wanted to get back before the wind blew too hard. It looked like a squall for a little while, but it flattened out again."

"I meant to go and see her again before we went home," Molly commented. "But there won't be a chance now." She looked at her watch. "Paul ought to be her any minute," she said. 'It's ten minutes past."

"Charlie bringing him down is he?" Dill inquired; and she nodded.

"I might have gone to meet him," she explained. "But I expected to be so busy today, and it takes time. . . ."

Nell's thoughts were on her own problem. "I

don't know whether to go over there or not," she said, half to herself. "It must have been almost four when we got there, and he said he'd stay to dinner if she asked him."

"She'd be sure to ask him," Molly reminded her. "She's a hospitable soul. And of course she likes publicity."

Mrs. Sockford, putting their supper on the table, said critically: "I should think she'd be careful what folks'd say about her. There ain't a living soul on the island but them two."

Molly caught Nell's eye in enjoyment of this; but she did not smile. "I'm sure Madame Capello wouldn't violate the conventions," she declared. "Haven't the men servants gone back yet? No, I remember, their boat is still down at the wharf, isn't it?"

"Was the last time I was down," Dill assented. He had finished his chores, washed his face and hands, and now sat down to his supper; and Molly looked at her watch again.

"Paul ought to be here," she said again; and went into the front room to look up the road for the lights of an approaching car. She stood there a moment, inattentive to the talk which still went forward in the kitchen; and then she called to Dill:

"I wonder if the train was late?"

"Heard it whistle in," he replied.

"I'm going to call Charlie," she decided, and took up the telephone and rang this man, the town taxicab driver. It occurred to her, before her call was answered that he would not yet have returned to the garage; but a moment later his voice came over the line.

"Charlie?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"This is Mrs. Main, Charlie,'" she said. "I thought you were going to bring Mr. Main down from the train."

"He didn't get in, Mrs. Main," Charlie told her; and she felt a quick clutch at her heart.

"You mean the train's late?" she asked, hopefully. Dill might have been wrong.

"No ma'am, it's come and gone; but he didn't get off of her."

"Oh," she said hesitantly; and felt Nell at her elbow; and she added: "Thank you, Charlie!" And restored the receiver to its hook. "I can't imagine. . . ." she said to Nell. "He said he'd surely come. If he didn't, he'd telephone. . . ."

Then she remembered that the island phone was disconnected; and she called: "Dill, Paul didn't telephone you he wasn't coming, did he?"

"No, he didn't," Dill assured her, and came

into the living-room curiously. "What's the matter? Didn't he come?"

On a quick, alarmed impulse she picked up the telephone again and put in a call for her home in Boston. As sometimes happens, the call went through quickly; it was no more than a minute till she was talking to Richard, the house man who had gone down this morning. What he had to say failed to solve the small mystery. Mr. Main had met them at the train, dispatched them by taxicab to the house; they last saw him in the station there.

"Did he have time to catch the train?" she asked; and he said:

"Yes, madam."

"You haven't heard anything from him since?"

"No, madam."

Molly hesitated, asked perfunctorily: "Are the children all right?" And when he reassured her, she said: "Let me say good night to them." So young Paul and Margaret came to the other end of the wire and she heard their high, excited voices, thrilling with affection, and found some comfort there.

When she put down the instrument, Dill said reassuringly: "Probably missed the train somehow, and he'll come along on the ten-forty-two."

"I should think he'd have telephoned," Molly protested.

"Hard to get this line sometimes," he reminded her. "Mrs. Sockford was up the road most of the afternoon, and nobody here, with me at the island. He'll come all right. You set down and eat supper and wait here for him."

Molly was uncertain and concerned, yet tried to laugh at her own fears. "No, I think I'll go back to the island," she decided. "He may not come at all. Or he may have gotten off at Weirs and got a ride up." She added quickly: "I remember, there was a boat coming up the lake as I came down."

"Wa'n't time then," Dill reminded her logically; but she shook aside this objection.

"Well, that's what must have happened," she insisted. "I'll go along back. He must be there." She turned aside, then laughed reluctantly. "Just the same, I'd hate to get back to the island and not find him. It's lonesome without any one there."

Nell slipped her hand through the older woman's arm. "I'll go up with you," she offered. "Stay all night, if you want me."

"Oh, he must be there," Molly insisted.

"Well, in case he isn't," Nell urged. "I'd love to, really."

"It's a shame to bother you," Molly protested. "But—it is lonely."

"If he's there, I'll keep out of the way," Nell promised with a little laugh. "I know three's a crowd."

Molly squeezed her arm. "Don't be absurd," she retorted. "We're old married folk; we don't mind spectators. We got all over being embarrassed years ago."

Dill laughed. "That's right, too," he agreed heartily; and they all laughed together.

"Come down with me while I get a nightie," Nell suggested. "And I'll tell them where I'm going."

"You're a dear to do it," Molly told her. "I ought not to let you." And Nell cried:

"But don't be absurd! I'd love to. I love that big house, any way. It makes me feel like a duchess, just to be in it. I ought to put on my finest gown, I suppose. . . ."

So in the end they said good night to Dill and Mrs. Sockford; and Dill promised to bring Paul up if he arrived on the later train. "But he's probably there waiting for you now," he agreed. "Or on the way down to find you. You'll likely meet him."

Molly hesitated. "If he's gone up, it's funny he didn't stop here," she said. "If he comes, tell

him where I've gone," she added anxiously; and Dill laughed.

"I'll give him some tale or other," he assured her. "I'll tell him a-plenty, all right."

As the two went down the road together, and through the great hemlocks toward the Harmon cottage, Nell exclaimed ruefully: "There, I've abandoned that reporter to his fate. He'll probably swear at me."

Molly, suddenly afraid the other would change her mind, gripped her arm. "She'll take care of him," she reminded the girl. "And the men can bring him ashore when they get back, if he is really in a hurry. Besides, you've promised to go with me, now, Nell."

Nell, sensing the other's anxiety, answered warmly: "Of course, I have. But you're not to worry, mind."

"Why, I know Paul is all right," Molly insisted; but even to her own ears her tone was unconvincing; and she fought against a sickening uneasiness and concern.

It was easier, during the minute or two they were in the Harmon cottage. She liked Mr. Harmon, and Nell's mother too; but though they urged her to stay there, Nell negatived this. "Paul's probably waiting for her at the island," she explained. "And Molly's in a hurry to get to

him. I'll be back in the morning, mother." She kissed them both, scurrying with a suggestion of business-like haste. "Now Molly, come along. . . ."

They went back toward the landing where Molly's canoe lay; and as they approached the high road, Dill came toward them through the darkness. "Come down to see you off," he explained. "I'll carry you up in the boat if you want."

"Oh we'd rather paddle," Nell assured him. Molly might have accepted the offer, since in the motorboat they would have come so much more quickly to the island and to Paul. But she was unwilling to oppose Nell's wish, so she echoed it.

"Yes, of course," she agreed.

"There ain't enough wind yet to bother you," Dill commented. "You'll be in the lee, all but from the point over to the island." He loosed the painter of the canoe and held it while they got in. Molly put Nell, whose skill she recognized, in the stern. "I'd really rather paddle bow," she insisted. "I always do, with Paul." And they slid away from the wharf into the darkness.

"I'll be up in the morning," Dill called after them. "Or tonight, if I have to bring him up."

"I'm sure he's there," Molly told him, reassuring herself. "Good night, Dill!"

They heard his answering call; and so moved on a little way, till half a dozen rods of water separated them from the wharf. Then Molly caught the murmur of a car coming down the road, its mud-guards squeaking as it rebounded across the ruts at speed; and she said quickly:

"There he comes now."

So Nell turned the canoe and they started back toward the wharf again. But when the car stopped with an abrupt whine of brakes, in the glare from its headlights they saw four men running out along the wharf.

"They're the Little Dog servants," Nell said in a low tone. "See, they're getting ready to start the boat." Lights pricked through the night; and then Dill's voice came to them across the water.

"That you, Bart?" he asked. "What you doing up this way?"

"Going out to Little Dog," the man called Bart replied. "There's trouble out there!"

"What kind of trouble?" Dill asked sharply; and the other answered:

"Someone's gone and killed that woman that lives there."

Then the grind of the starter and the purr of the engine drowned their voices; but the two in the canoe, listening in stark intensity, heard Dill cry more loudly:

"That op'ry singer?"

"Yep," said Bart. "We got a phone call from Big Dog."

The motorboat was in motion now, backed and swung and straightened out and darted away; it receded into the night, the single white light above its stern diminishing swiftly, the whisper of its engine lost almost at once in the further murmur of the wind. Presently, while Nell and Molly still stared after it in frozen fixity, an island came between; the light was blotted out; the boat was gone.

IV

UNTIL the motorboat on its way to Little Dog passed out of sight beyond the island, Nell and Molly said no word; and even when it was gone they sat for a moment motionless and still. Then Nell cried softly:

"Killed!"

Molly caught her breath, and her tone was no more than a whisper. All about them lay the silent lake; and out beyond the lee the wind stirred across the water. "Do you suppose it's true?"

"That was Bart Dale," Nell replied. "He's a deputy sheriff or something. It must be."

"It doesn't seem possible!" Molly protested.

"Jim Newbert's over there," Nell remembered. "He must be over there still."

"You don't think he did it?" Molly cried; and Nell shook her head.

"No, no. No, he's awfully attractive," she protested. "He's really ever so nice. No, but he must be there." She added quickly: "Let's go over, Molly. Let's paddle over there right now."

Molly shuddered. "No, no, Nell. No, you can

go if you want to; but I'm not going. I'll get Dill to take me to the island, and then you can go."

Nell laughed uneasily. "I don't really want to," she confessed. "It's—rather terrifying, isn't it? I wonder who did do it. There weren't even any servants there."

"She was so friendly," Molly reminded the other. "I liked her. Poor thing!"

"It might have been that black maid," Nell suggested. "She certainly acted as though she'd done something. She was in an awful hurry, Molly. . . ."

They had forgotten to paddle, sitting idly in the lee, thinking aloud; but Dill must have heard their low voices, for that man called now from the wharf:

"That you, Mis' Main?"

"Yes, Dill," Molly answered.

"Hear what they said, did you?" he asked; and Nell swung the canoe back toward the wharf, and paddled that way as Molly admitted that they had heard.

"Guess there'll be some excitement around here when folks hear about it," Dill remarked in a tone of satisfaction.

"It's terrible," Molly reminded him. "She was such a harmless person. Nice as she could be."

"Always one to have trouble, she was," Dill protested. "Nothing ever was to suit her. I've heard tell how she'd go into a fit, like, when she was mad."

Nell laughed at him. "You didn't sell her milk, did you, Dill?"

"Never had a thing to do with her," Dill replied. "See her, a few times, when she come to the landing here; but she never let on to see me. Wa'n't one to see folks unless they was her kind." He added in a provocative tone. "You was over there your own self this afternoon. Guess the police'll be after you, Nell!"

"I didn't even land," Nell reminded him; and she added thoughtfully: "Maybe she was already —dead, then. Or maybe I could have done something."

"That reporter over there still, prob'ly," Dill remarked. "Well, he'll have a story to put in the paper now all right. Guess we'll have more like him around here for a spell. This'll make a noise, all right."

Molly said, half to herself: "I wish Paul were here."

Nell considered this, said quickly: "Maybe he came up from Weirs with someone and went over there. He might have heard about it and stopped there to find out what happened, or to help."

"He'd come to get me first," Molly insisted confidently. "And they wouldn't know about it yet at Weirs."

"Bart lives in Lakeport," Dill reminded them. "Guess if he'd heard about it, others would."

"Paul must have heard," Nell decided. "Probably he got off the train and went over to Little Dog on his way to the island. That's why he didn't stop for you here." She dipped her paddle again. "He's probably at the island now, Molly. We'll go on up there."

Molly agreed. "Yes, yes, that's it," she decided. "Let's hurry, Nell. Good night, Dill!"

"Want I should go along?" Dill suggested. "Won't be nervous up there if he ain't there, will you?"

"Oh, he's there," Molly insisted; and Nell added:

"Besides, there's nothing to be nervous about."

"They's a murderer loose around here," he reminded them; but they were drawing away from the wharf and he left the sentence unfinished. After they had covered a few rods, Molly looked back and saw, dimly in the starlit night, that he was going along the wharf toward the shore. His figure disappeared there; and the night and the lonely lake closed in around them. Only, far off to the east in the open water south of Little Dog

she caught a glimpse of a moving light; and the muffled and remote exhaust of a motorboat came to her ears.

"There'll be a lot of people there pretty soon," she told Nell. "Everybody'll be there."

"Like running to a fire," Nell said, in faint scorn; and Molly nodded.

"Paul and I ought to go over," she remarked. "I expect we knew Madame Capello better than anyone else around here. There ought to be someone there to look after things till her friends come." She added, half to herself: "I wonder if she had any—intimate friends. I never heard her speak of them."

Nell made no reply. She was guiding the canoe close along the shore, avoiding by deft turns the sunken rocks whose location in these shallow waters she knew of old. The wind had not yet struck them; and when presently they rounded the point, Nell still kept close to shore and avoided its impact. But she said at last:

"It's blowing harder, Molly."

"Dill said it would blow," Molly agreed. "I expect we'll have a thunder shower, by the way it feels."

"It's late for them," Nell suggested.

"They're never out of season here," Molly reminded her, and laughed a little. "I love them

at night," she said. "I like to be out in them, feel the water in my face. . . . Paul and I go swimming sometimes, when one comes along at night. It's wonderful!"

"I know," Nell agreed. She added ruefully: "I've never got used to them, though. I'm simply terrified."

They were, thereafter, silent for a while, following the wooded shore, swinging out a little now and then to pass the wharves and boathouses set hereabouts. The cottages to which these structures appertained were dark and deserted; and the two spoke of the people who had spent the summers here, carefully avoiding that topic uppermost in their minds. These folk they had liked and those they had disliked; and these had been friendly, and those had seemed to avoid contact with their neighbors; and the girl who lived here swam beautifully and dived like a professional, and the boy who lived there was forever busy with his motorboats. . . . Small matters and inconsequent; yet it was better to talk than to be silent; and better to talk of these things than of the slain woman on her island over across the lake.

For more than a mile of the way to the island, they were able to keep half in the lee, close along the shore; but at last it became necessary to strike

out across open water. When they did so they could see, far off, the lights on Little Dog. The big house was all ablaze, every window illumined. Yet it was so remote that they got no echo of the activities there; it seemed silent and serene.

"As though she were having a party," Molly commented half aloud. "It always looked so at night. She liked having lights everywhere."

When the matter which filled both their thoughts was thus brought into the open, they discussed it more frankly; and Molly remembered that she had sometimes thought the singer lived in fear.

"She seemed to have a look in her eyes," she told Nell. "Didn't you ever notice it?"

"I saw her only a few times," Nell confessed. "And when there were usually a lot of people about. I noticed she was terribly animated."

"I've seen her when she didn't know I was watching her," Molly persisted. "She used to keep looking around; and her mouth, when she wasn't talking or laughing, had the saddest lines. . . ."

"There's a light in your living-room," Nell pointed out. "Paul's there."

"I left it on," Molly explained. "But I'm sure he's there. Or maybe starting to find me. Watch

for him, Nell. He'd be over toward the mainland more; and it's so dark we might miss him."

"He'd get out where the wind would help him," Nell agreed. "We'll be in the lee again pretty soon," she added. "But it's pretty stiff now, isn't it?"

Molly nodded, thrusting her weight against the paddle with a steady rhythm. "We don't seem to be moving at all," she remarked. "But the island gets higher in front of us all the time."

"See the black, up northwest there. Those are clouds," Nell pointed out. "I can smell a thunder shower afar off!" She laughed at her own weakness.

"We'll be ahead of it, easily," Molly reminded her; and Nell agreed.

"It won't get here for an hour," she estimated.

They were forced, for a part of the way from lee to lee, to work a steady energy which made speech impossible. The two were not unaccustomed to a canoe; and Nell in particular was expert. So they did the task without comment, their bodies swaying to the stroke, throwing their weight into at the end in that fashion which appears awkward yet is so effective. The wind was quartering; and Nell swung them this way and that, taking it bow on when it was most oppres-

sive, sliding away along the trough of the waves when the pressure eased. Now and then a splash struck Molly's face; her right arm was wet to the elbow; and once a cup of water slipped over the gunwale and dashed against her ankle. But by and by the resistance to their progress eased, they went forward more readily; and so they came at last into the lee under the island's southward end.

So long as they were in the open, the mild turbulence about them had filled their ears; but now, in this quieter spot, they could hear more easily; and Nell said in a low tone:

"Did you hear a paddle, over toward the channel?"

The channel behind the island lay to the east; Paul, even assuming he had set out to fetch Molly, would not have gone that way. So Molly echoed:

"Toward the channel?"

"It may have been the other side," Nell agreed. "May have been Paul."

Molly called, in a clear tone: "Paul! Paul!" But no reply came back to them; and Nell said quickly:

"I guess I didn't hear anything." She swung along the shore into the cove below the house; and they saw the high bulk of the mole outlined

against the sky, rising higher as they approached it, the house itself almost above their heads.

"Were you sure you heard a paddle?" Molly asked once; and Nell shook her head, replied in an unduly emphatic tone:

"No, no, I must have been wrong."

"I hope he didn't get by us," Molly murmured, half to herself.

They passed the mole and drew into the cove where the boathouses lay; and as they came alongside the wharf there, Molly looked toward the house. Through the wide windows of the living-room she could see the glowing lamp, bright and reassuring.

"He probably knew I'd come back," she told Nell. "He's awfully matter of fact, you know. He wouldn't worry about me."

They climbed out of the canoe, and lifted it upon the wharf, and moved toward the shore. Behind them a rumble stirred, not so much audible as palpable beneath their feet; and Nell cried softly:

"Thunder! We're just in time. Let's hurry, Molly!"

Molly laughed at her. "It's only a step now. You come behind me. I can follow this path in the dark." She started toward the house along the way among the birches and the young hem-

locks, turning and twisting among its intricacies. There were boulders ranged along either side of the path; and sometimes her feet came in contact with them, but always gently, for she felt her way. They heard thunder again as they drew near the veranda steps; but Molly was inattentive. She was trying, through the windows, to see whether Paul were in the living-room. He would be sitting in the wicker chair beyond the lamp, she knew; but the path was low, the house high, and the chair was below her line of vision through the windows. She whispered to Nell: "Quiet! Let's scare him!"

"If it thunders again, I shall scream," Nell retorted, laughing at her own folly. Yet her tone trembled, too; and a moment later, when they reached the lowermost step, the distant thunder rumbled and she clutched at Molly's arm. At the same time, the light in the living room went out; the great house rose above them dark and still; and by the pain of Nell's grip, and the fact of this sudden darkness, Molly was halted. She stopped, startled and uncertain.

"The light went out!" she exclaimed.

"Lightning struck it," Nell suggested uneasily. "Our lights always go out."

"That lightning's twenty miles away," Molly reminded her; but she added in a relieved tone:

"But I remember now, there's a bad connection in the plug. We have to keep pushing it further in. That's probably what happened. Come on."

She led the way up the steps, boldly enough for all her faint concern. Beside the door there was a button which actuated the veranda light; and she pressed this and the light sprang into being, isolating them within its circle, revealing them to all the world. She opened the screen door, reminding herself to have Dill be sure and take the screens off before bad weather came; and inside she touched another button which served the table lamp beside the door. In this illumination her eyes swept this way and that. The great chimney rose before her, gnarled and rugged like the weathered stump of an ancient pine whose decaying limbs, fallen away, have left their skeletons to whiten in the rain. It hid half the room; and she had a momentary thought that Paul might be here, might have turned off the light and slipped behind the chimney to hide from them. He had played that jest before; and she cried softly:

"Paul!" Receiving no reply she called again: "Paul! Don't you jump out at me!" There was a tremulous uncertainty in her tones.

"He's not here, is he?" Nell asked.

"He hides behind the chimney sometimes,"

Molly told her. She went doubtfully toward the table where stood the lamp which had gone out; and she bent and tried the plug and the light flashed on. "That was it," she told Nell.

"He's not behind the chimney," Nell said. "I guess he hasn't come. I guess he isn't here."

Molly stood uncertainly, a finger pressed against her cheek. "I don't see what can have happened," she protested. "He'd surely have telephoned Dill, anyway."

"The line was out of order this afternoon," Nell told her. "There was some trouble up on the Neck road. A pole fell, or something; and all the telephones down here were dead for a while."

"Ours has been disconnected," Molly explained; and she added: "Or at least, I couldn't get any one this afternoon."

Nell nodded; and she sat down on the wicker settee before the hearth. "Shall we have a fire?" she suggested. "Or do you want to go to bed?"

"It isn't eight o'clock yet," Molly reminded her. "And besides, I'll surely hear from Paul." She took a stick or two of wood from the basket, chose kindling, and struck a match; and the flame grew and began to dance pleasantly. She sat down beside Nell and the two remained a moment silent, staring at the flames. Save for their

chuckle and whicker, the house was still; the disturbed water splashing against the mole outside was only a distant slumberous accompaniment to this silence here. The wind was steadily increasing in intensity; and a window in the dining room blew open with a crash and bang, affrighting as a pistol shot in the lonely stillness there.

They came to their feet with a single motion; and Nell cried: "What was that!" But Molly was already laughing; and she started toward the dining room.

"A window blew open," she explained. "It always does. You have to wedge the latch. I'll close it before it starts to rain." Her way lay through the billiard room; and this and the dining room were dark, but she pressed on the lights as she went through, and closed the window and secured it. Nell had come half-way to follow her; said laughingly now:

"It scared me! Didn't it you?"

"Startled me," Molly agreed. "I was wondering about Paul."

"I suppose we're both—nervous," Nell confessed. "A thunder storm always makes me nervous anyway."

"I haven't heard any more thunder," Molly reminded her. "It may have gone around."

"It's the air," Nell explained. "Don't you feel how warm it is, and the way it prickles at you. And of course we're both thinking about Madame Capello, Molly. There's no use pretending."

"It's so—pitiful," Molly agreed. "She was there all alone."

Nell made a protesting gesture. "Don't say that," she laughed. "We're here all alone, too; and on an island too. I didn't come up here to be scared to death, Molly."

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Molly said in a matter of fact fashion. The other's half-jocular confession of weakness had the effect of strengthening her. "Not a thing in the world."

"I'm a poor weak woman," Nell conceded. "But I could be scared to death if I half tried. I wish I was a big man with a big gun. Haven't you got a pistol or something, Molly, for me to play with?"

Molly started to answer; and then she hesitated for an instant, rigid and still. Paul's pistol was in his tackle box; and so also, she now remembered, was her emerald. And Paul had bought the emerald from Madame Capello! She had, till this moment, not thought of the stone at all; it had never occurred to her that there might be between it and the singer's death any

least connection. She sat like a stone, her thoughts racing, till Nell said:

"Molly!"

Molly looked at her then; asked with stiff lips: "What?"

"Can't I have a pretty pistol please," Nell insisted, teasingly. "Paul must have one, hasn't he? If I had it, I'd be so brave and bold. . . ."

Molly nodded. "Yes," she agreed. "Yes, he has one." She hesitated, then added: "But I'm desperately afraid of it. Besides, there's nothing for us to be afraid of here. . . ."

Her voice, even to her own ears, sounded hollow and unconvincing. She thought Nell must detect the fraud and accuse her of it. But if the younger woman did perceive Molly's mood she made no comment; instead she rose and stood with her back to the fire; and she began to talk very gaily and charmingly about unimportant things, and to wander to and fro across the room, glancing at the books along the shelves, lifting the magazines on the table, returning to poke at the logs on the fire with the toe of her shoe. And after a little she tricked Molly into a smile, and then to laughter, too; and Molly rose and put her arm about the other's shoulder.

"There!" she said. "You're a dear girl. I was terrified for a moment, but I'm all right now."

"'Besides,'" Nell quoted derisively, and in a trembling and a timorous tone. "'Besides, there's n-nothing for us to be afraid of h-here. . . .'"

At which they both laughed consumingly, and sat down again before the fire.

V

IT is usual to number the human senses as five; sometimes to speak of a sixth, common sense, or intuition. But most people possess in greater or less degree a seventh sense besides; and this seventh sense, usually called imagination, complements and completes the others. The eye sees things which actually are; the imagination creates like a nimbus around things seen those other things which are invisible. The ear hears sounds and catalogues them; a voice, a squeak, a slam, a thump, a bang. The imagination discovers behind these sounds their explanations, plausible or absurd, simple or terrifying. It is so with the senses of taste and smell and touch; they report to the brain "sour" or "acrid" or "rough" and the imagination, working upon the data thus secured, perfects the portrait of the thing perceived. The eye sees a face at a window; the imagination discovers the hidden body, awful and appalling. The ear hears an explosion; the imagination perceives a firearm. Those things which we see or hear

or taste or smell or touch are relatively few; it is the imagination which receives these concrete but limited impressions and from them builds about us a complete and ordered world.

Molly and Nell, alone here this night in the big house on the island, had already encountered experiences calculated to stimulate their imaginative faculties. The result was that they were already beginning to imagine things which did not exist. No matter how brave a face she might put upon the situation, Molly felt quite sure that something had happened to Paul; and no matter though her own senses told her the threatening thunder shower had passed them by, Nell cringed as though lightning were already lancing at her flesh. No matter how well she knew that the window in the dining room had blown open many times before, and that the light here beside them had gone out of itself in the past, Molly could not help wondering now whether any human agency had been involved in these occurrences tonight. As for Nell, though she knew the thing was impossible, she could not help the appalling certainty that someone was watching them through the bald, uncurtained windows at their back. . . .

So as the two sat there before the fire, talking gravely about a mirthful book which each of late had read, they were for all the apparent re-

laxation of their postures keyed and alert; they stared at the fire because they were afraid of what, if their glances strayed, they might discover; they raised their voices because they feared what in the silence they might hear. More than once Molly had a sense of movement somewhere above them, in the upper floor of the house, or around the balcony which made a three-quarter circle of the living-room at the second floor level. It was vague and indeterminate, this impression; she resolutely refused to weigh it, put it steadily aside.

But by and by Nell paused in the midst of what she was saying to listen; and Molly listened too. They heard, outside, the steady and increasing tumult of the wind, blowing now with a vehemence surprising, like a mid-summer squall. "I thought I heard a motorboat," said Nell, softly and low.

They listened for a space, and then Molly shook her head. "I don't hear it."

Another moment's silence, and Nell nodded. "I guess I didn't," she agreed, and went on with that which she had been saying. But after a sentence or so she stopped again, with a sharp word. "There!"

This time the faint, far staccato was plainly audible; and Molly heard it too, and came to her

feet. "It's Paul!" she cried. And she went toward the door that led out upon the mole before the house, and flung it open and stepped out; and so called back to Nell: "I can see the lights, coming this way."

Nell followed her then; and the two went out upon the mole. The wind whipped at them, thrust and buffeted and tumbled them about, lashing across the open with a degree of force astonishing. Yet the thunder in the air had rendered it close and oppressive, so that they had no immediate discomfort; and although there were heavy clouds obscuring the stars in the northwest, there was no present threat of a shower. They two stood arm in arm, watching the red and green lights of the approaching craft; and they saw the water, flying across her bow, obscure these lights again and again; and the colored rays colored the spray that dashed about them. But after a moment Nell said:

"They're holding pretty well out, Molly, if it's Paul. And that isn't Dill's boat."

"It's dark," Molly argued. "They can't tell just where they are, yet; so they'd hold outside till they see the sky line."

"They can see the lights here in the house," Nell reminded her; and Molly perceived the justice of this, and thereafter watched the approach-

ing craft in despondent silence. As it came nearer, and passed abreast of them, with an unconscious instinct the two drew down below the level of the windows, so that they would not be silhouetted against the light; and thus invisible they kept their vigil there. But the boat paid them no heed; went steadily past and bore away around the northern end of the island toward the upper arm of the lake. They watched till it was surely gone; and Nell held Molly's arm and said sympathetically:

"Don't worry, Molly! He's all right."

Molly tried to laugh. "Why—I'm not worrying," she insisted. "There's not a thing to worry about." She shivered faintly. "But I'm a little cold. We might as well go inside."

When they turned toward the door, they faced the southern end of the island; and it was then that Nell saw the skiff approaching; saw it as a blot upon the water, near the shore, not a hundred yards away. And she caught Molly's arm, and pointed, and drew her quickly down with an uncontrollable impulse of surprise and vague alarm. The two knelt at the level of the mole, concealed there behind the rocky balustrade; and Molly whispered:

"Did he see us?"

Nell shook her head. "He's rowing hard; has

to, against the wind. So his back must be this way."

The skiff was by this time almost beneath them; they peered cautiously over the balustrade and saw the figure of a man at the oars. It passed them and turned into the cove beyond, where the boathouses were, and went steadily toward these buildings, disappearing in the shadows at the inward end of the wharf. They listened and heard the rattle of oars laid across the thwarts; and then heard the man step ashore on the wharf.

"He's tying the boat," Nell whispered; and Molly heard the girl's teeth chattering, and said reassuringly:

"Of course he is; he wouldn't let it drift away. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"It wasn't Paul," Nell reminded her. "You'd have known him, even in the dark."

"He's coming up the path," Molly warned; and they heard the man stumble against one of the boulders that bordered that narrow way, and heard his muttered remonstrance at this ill fortune, and his gasp of pain. They moved toward the northern side of the mole, their eyes at the level of the veranda floor, peering beneath the lower rail; and the newcomer reached the foot of the steps of the side veranda, the length of

the living-room away; and ascended them and came into the circle of illumination shed by the piazza light there. Molly had never seen him before; but Nell gasped with faint relief.

"It's that reporter," she whispered. "It's Mr. Newbert! Come on, Molly, before he finds us hiding here."

The reporter was by this time knocking; and Molly and Nell moved to the door by which they had come out upon the mole and thus entered the living-room at the opposite corner from that where he waited for admission. It was Molly who went to open the door for him; but Nell was at her shoulder, and Newbert looked first at Molly, a curious relief in his eyes, and then at Nell, and recognized her and smiled.

"Oh, hello," he said quickly. "This isn't where you live, is it?"

Nell shook her head. "No. This is Mr. Newbert, Molly. Mrs. Main. No, I'm just spending the night here."

At Molly's invitation he came in; and they saw him look quickly about the room. He said at once: "I'm lucky to find you up, I expect. Must be late, isn't it?"

Nell shook her head, smiling gravely. "No; no, it isn't nine yet."

He laughed. "I've been rowing that blamed

boat all over the lake," he explained; and they saw that he was in fact flushed and hot. "Some job to handle it in this wind, when you get out of the lee." A stronger gust swung wide the door by which he had entered a moment before; and one of the panes struck the corner of the table and shattered, and they both whirled in dismay. Molly hurried to close the door.

"The latch slips," she explained. "We can't seem to get it fixed."

"Guess that's my fault," the reporter confessed regretfully. "I didn't shut it tight." He laughed. "Made me jump when that busted open right behind me. Listen to it blow now." He wiped his forehead, stood appreciatively before the fire. "I was hot enough rowing, but a fire seems good, too."

Molly watched him with a curious and attentive eye, while he told them, in a fashion which made them smile, his misadventures. "I'll know better next time," he said, "than to try to row a light boat in a wind. And my oars weren't long enough to do any good; and if I let out at all, they bent double. I was afraid I'd break one. Did catch a crab once, and lost the right hand oar; and I had to paddle around half an hour before I found it."

"I'd have come after you," Nell said apolo-

getically. "But I thought they'd set you back at the landing in the motor boat."

"Oh, that's all right," he assured her. "I didn't expect you to. Mighty good of you to do all you did, carrying me over there. You got home all right, did you?"

She smiled. "What do you think?" she challenged; and he laughed, and said approvingly:

"Guess you're safe enough anywhere, in a canoe. Wish I'd had you to paddle me tonight."

"Did you come to see Mrs. Main?" Nell asked. "Do you want to interview her, or something like that? I'd love to hear an interview." Her tone was gently derisive; and he flushed, and then grinned.

"No, no," he protested; and added carefully: "No, I just started out to row back to the landing, and the wind was blowing pretty hard, so I got up in the lee of some islands. Thought I knew the way all right; but it was pretty fairly dark, and I couldn't see where I was going. That's the trouble with rowing; you're back to the front. I was pretty thoroughly lost by and by; and I've been poking into coves and blind alleys and one thing and another ever since. I got in the lee of the island here, finally, and rested for a while, trying to figure out what to do; and then I saw a motorboat go by, and I tried to hail them. Knew

they couldn't hear me if I yelled; but I got out in their course, or as near as I could. They went by, though; didn't see me, probably. I figured they'd be going to the landing; and I set out to trail after them. Didn't see the lights here till I got right opposite; so I decided to come ashore and find out where I was, anyway."

Molly, sitting relaxed in the broad wicker seat before the fire, watched him speculatively. He spoke, it seemed to her, too readily; and at the same time she thought he was uneasy, uncertain, groping for solid ground. She wondered if Nell also felt this, and glanced toward the younger girl. But Nell was saying seriously:

"Why, this is the Main's island, Paul Main. The landing is down below here, two miles maybe. You'll have the wind behind you all the way. Just keep going ahead of it, and keep close to the land on the right hand side. The left as you'll be sitting, rowing. You can't miss it."

He looked faintly dismayed. "Sound's easy enough," he agreed. "But these directions that can't be missed turn out pretty confusing, sometimes. Are there any islands in between?"

Molly spoke. "Why don't you sit down and rest awhile before you start, Mr. Newbert? You must be tired."

He accepted this invitation with such alacrity

sat down so promptly in a chair beside the fire, that Molly smiled to herself. And she added encouragingly: "You were over at Little Dog, weren't you? I thought Nell said she took you over. You can tell us what happened over there?"

He looked at her with quick intentness. "Heard about it, have you?" he asked.

"Just that Madame Capello is—dead," Molly told him. "That someone killed her."

The young man wiped his forehead again. "Didn't want to scare you," he explained. "In case you hadn't heard. Bad business, all right."

Nell leaned forward. "I almost stayed there with you, to bring you home," she exclaimed. "Thank goodness I didn't."

He grinned. "Well, it would have been tough for you," he agreed. "I'd have been glad to have had you there, though. For a while."

"Do they know who did it?" Nell asked; and he shook his head. Yet Molly thought there was a reservation in his tone.

"No," he said. "No, haven't a notion. There's a crowd of people over there by now, of course, all over everything. Things pretty much confused."

"Did you see her?" Nell insisted. "When did it happen? Before you got there, or while you were there, or when?"

Molly, still and remote, withdrew herself from them; though she sat so near she was at the same time infinitely far away, and they forgot she was there. Or Nell forgot, plying him with questions. Of his forgetfulness Molly was not so sure; at least he looked every little while in her direction, and at such times he smiled as though in comfort and reassurance, curiously.

"They don't exactly know," he confessed. "You see. . . ."

"I know," Nell cried. "It was that maid of hers, that negro girl. Don't you remember we met her, rowing like mad, on the way over; and she landed and just jumped out of the boat and bolted up the road. She did it; I know she did."

He shook his head. "Guess not," he said. "Guess it wasn't the girl. They're looking for her, of course. She must have seen something, must have been scared to death. That's probably why she ran away. But she didn't do it; that's sure."

Molly asked a question, prompted by her own thoughts. "Won't you have to telephone about it to your paper, or telegraph, or something?"

"Oh, I got them on the wire," Newbert assured her. "Got that all taken care of. No, I don't have to worry about that at all."

Yet with this duty done, he had, if he told the truth, left Little Dog and started for the

landing; yet his business should have been, it seemed to her, to stay at the island, watch developments. Unless there were other, more pressing matters on his mind. . . .

"But how do you know she didn't do it?" Nell insisted; and she made an impatient movement. "You're not telling us very much," she protested. "Start at the beginning and tell us all about it. Don't make us drag it out of you."

He said uncertainly, with a glance at Molly: "You'll have nightmares. You don't want to hear it." But Molly smiled reassuringly; and Nell said:

"Indeed we do."

So in the end he swung into the tale; and when he was once begun, the narrative flowed more readily. He seemed at times to forget them; his eyes were half-closed, and he stared at the fire. This, Molly reminded herself, was the professional reporter at his task; it was as though he were dictating for a newspaper audience to read.

"Well," he said. "The maid must have left the island, this Little Dog island, about half past three, possibly a little before. She was seen half a mile away at a quarter of four or so. She landed on the mainland and disappeared and the police have not yet located her. She reached the landing about four o'clock."

"We got to Little Dog just before four," Nell reminded him; and he nodded.

"Yes," he agreed. "Yes, five minutes of four, by my watch. It's right, I guess. I looked at it, because I was supposed to be there at three. I had an appointment, you know; and we waited for that Bafford youngster to get his boat working, till it was too late to make it on time." He hesitated, continued then:

"There wasn't anyone about the boathouse when we got there; and you turned around and paddled right away. I watched you go, and then I took a look around. I'd never been on Little Dog. The house, you know, is back from the landing, quite a ways from it. They built the boathouse where it would be sheltered, in the cove facing Big Dog; but the house is on the other side of the island, facing down the lake, probably two hundred yards away. I took the wrong path at first, and came up toward the tennis court; and then I could see the house, so I cut across through the trees toward it. I heard a boat, a motorboat, down south of the island while I was there in the woods; but that didn't mean anything to me then. I came in past the kitchen end of the house, and around the side."

He hesitated, looked at them inquiringly. "You know the way the house is set?" he suggested;

and Polly nodded. "It struck me as quite a place," he explained. "But I didn't stop to inspect it much. I was anxious to find her and apologize for being late and so on. There were glass doors on the side, opening on the veranda there; but there wasn't any bell, so I went on around to the front. There wasn't any bell there, either; so I had to knock, and I did. Pounded away like a good fellow for a while, and waited for someone to come. But no one showed up."

Nell shuddered; and he smiled at her. "It was funny, all right," he agreed. "I tried to figure it out; and I thought probably the servants were in the kitchen and couldn't hear; so I went around there and knocked on the kitchen door. On the way around I'd seen windows open on the second floor, and I hallooed, trying to get someone to show up. But no one heard me, and no one came when I knocked."

He hesitated, then added gravely: "I saw the tracks of this dog, there by the kitchen door."

"What dog?" Nell asked sharply; and he said slowly:

"Well, that's a question, too! Afterward I remembered when I came around the house there was a motorboat going off, half a mile or so away, and a dog barking in it. I heard him. Then I saw these tracks by the kitchen door, in some

sand on the path; and when I went back down to the boathouse, trying to find someone there. I saw the tracks again, in the path. The creature had ranged around all over the place, apparently. A big dog."

He paused momentarily. "Well," he continued, "no one showed up; and there wasn't anyone at the boathouse, so I went back to the house. I thought there might be a beach somewhere, where they swam; thought maybe they were in swimming, away from the house. But I couldn't see any signs of one, and there was a bathing suit hanging in the boathouse. So I went back to the front door again; and things began to look funny to me. You see, I'd heard that Madame Capello was pretty careful about seeing reporters and that sort of thing. These singers all like publicity; and this had been arranged through her press agent, and I thought she'd take care to be at home, even if I was an hour or so late in getting there. So, I was curious." He smiled. "That's my business, you know; to be curious, and ask questions, and look things over pretty carefully. And then this house struck me. It's a fine place. I've seen some as big, but I never saw one that had such an air about it; so many strange things in it. I suppose a lot of them were hers. I hear she rented the place."

"But what did you do," Nell prompted. "What did you do?"

"Well," he said, beginning again with that premonitory word. "Well, the thing that made me make up my mind to have a look inside the house was this dog business. It struck me as funny that there'd been a dog on the island a few minutes before, and he wasn't there now. If it was the dog in the motorboat, then he'd gone off from the south side; and there wasn't any landing on that side of the island. It's all open water south of there for miles, of course; not like the north side, where the people on Big Dog could see what went on."

"There's nobody on Big Dog," Nell told him. "The Stranges went home last week."

"I know," he agreed. "I found that out later; but I'm just telling you what I thought at the time. Anyway, it seemed to me there might be something wrong. I suppose you can feel a thing like that. Anyway, after hallooing around some more, I opened the front door and started to step inside. There's glass in the upper part of the door, and I'd been looking in without seeing anything; but when I opened the door I saw something right away. There was a dog's track there inside the door. I didn't know what it was! It was just a little smudge. I thought it looked

like blood; I got down on my knees to look at it; and I touched it with my finger, the way you do fresh paint. It was still a little wet, just a shadow of it on the floor; and it was red all right.

"I thought there ought to be other spots on the steps outside; but I couldn't see any. There's a kind of matting on the floor outside the door, to wipe your feet on; and if there were marks, they didn't show. But I went inside the big living-room and looked around; and at first I didn't see anything in particular; but it seemed to me things were tumbled about a bit; and then I saw that the drawer of the table was half out, and I looked at it and the thing had been locked and had been pried open. And then I spotted the knife that had been used to open the drawer. The point of it was broken off; it was there in the drawer. It had red smears on it. That made me look for the knife, and it was on a chair beside the table, just lying there. I had gooseflesh all over me by that time." He laughed uncomfortably.

For a moment no one spoke, so intent were they upon his words. Outside, the wind wrestled with the trees, flung its bombardment of spray against the rockwork of the mole; and they heard thunder rumbling once more. Nell said at last:

"I should have screamed and screamed."

Newbert grinned. "Well, I felt like it," he agreed. "But there wasn't anybody to hear me if I did, so I kept still; but I looked around and spotted another mark, on the stairs this time. And this time it was plain enough! a dog's track, about half the foot showing, and marked in red. And there was another, two steps higher, and another, two steps above that; and each one was redder and more complete, till at the top you could see all the pads. This same big dog, it was. I'd seen his tracks outside, in the sand.

"I went upstairs, you see. And I was scared. Sweating like a pig, and my heart pounding, and my mouth wide open the way it is when you're listening for something you can't quite hear. I got to the head of the stairs and this dog's tracks came from the right, and I turned that way, going mighty quietly. There's a kind of a hall there, with French windows at the end. I kept expecting to see something in the rooms along the hall, but I didn't; and I kept looking back, in case any one was behind me; and then I noticed there was a door open at the other end of the hall, behind me; and I could see in through this door and see a dressing table, with mirrors, three mirrors on it. It struck me this must be Madame Capello's room, and I went back to have a look at it. I tried to tell myself I went back

because if she were anywhere she's probably be there; but as a matter of fact I'd had about enough of back-tracking this dog with the bloody foot.

"But when I got to the room, it was her room all right, but there was nobody in it. Only it had been pretty well worked over. Somebody looking mighty hard for something." His glance turned toward Molly; but when he met her eyes he swung quickly away again, looking once more at the fire. She was left in a chill and stony paralysis of understanding; knew instantly what was in his mind.

He finished the tale then very quickly. "So I bucked up," he explained. "And I went back along the hall toward the French doors. They opened out on a sort of sleeping porch, over the side veranda. It was screened in; but there was a hole in the screen as though someone had tried to tear it open. And she was there. There on the floor. I managed to take a look at her, enough so I could let the paper have the facts straight. The thing had been done with a knife, probably the knife downstairs. And this dog had had hold of her arm. Hadn't torn it; but you could see the bruised place, and the skin was scraped and rough." He added dispassionately: "It looked like she tried to get away and break through the

screen and the dog pinned her there till the man came along."

He broke off, moved as though to shake himself. "Guess that's enough," he commented. "I didn't mean to harrow you."

Nell made a quick, startled movement; she looked over her shoulder and around at the naked and uncurtained windows on every side of them. But Molly did not stir; she had scarce heard these last words of him. All her thoughts were concentrated on that single phrase. "Somebody looking mighty hard for something."

And she was completely sure that that "something" lay concealed at this moment in Paul's tackle box upstairs.

VI

BUT if Molly was inattentive to the conclusion of Newbert's fearful tale, Nell was not. Molly had other matters about which to concern herself; but Nell's attention was riveted on Newbert, and when he paused now she cried:

"How frightful! How perfectly terrible!"

She was for a moment silent, shuddering at the picture which he had drawn, the picture of a woman maddened by fear, fleeing blindly along that upper hall, tearing at the screen about the sleeping porch while the great dog leaped at her heels, and the man came bounding behind.

"What did you do?" she demanded. "What did you do?"

Newbert had been looking toward Molly; but his attention returned to Nell again, and he nodded, leaning forward toward the fire, resting his elbows on his knees, his fingers intertwined. "You're a glutton for detail, aren't you?" he said tolerantly.

"Oh, I don't mean that," she protested, and violently shook her head. "But what did you do after you found—her—there."

"I see," he agreed; and looked at Molly again,

and then carefully ignored her for a while. "Well," he explained. "I looked things over, and I reminded myself that this sort of thing was my job, so I took a pretty careful look around, and made some notes, and checked up on the time, and tried to remember my impressions of this motorboat that I'd seen going off, and the dog, and get them as accurately as possible. I went all over the house to see whether there was trouble anywhere else. I told you her dressing-room had been gone over pretty thoroughly, and this drawer in the living-room table broken open; and there's a kind of study off the living-room with a desk there, and he'd been in there, too."

He hesitated for a moment, then added: "There were some letters on the desk, that had been ready to mail; letters she'd written, I guess, stamped and everything. He'd opened some of them."

"Did you look at them?" Nell asked quickly; and he smiled at her.

"That's my business," he explained. But he added apologetically: "It wasn't—just curiosity. I thought possibly I might be able to make some suggestion to the police, by telephone; save them some time by looking around myself. I've been mixed up in things of this sort before, more or less, of course."

"What were the letters?" she demanded; and he laughed a little.

"Nothing of any consequence," he said evasively; and before she could insist he continued: "So I satisfied myself I'd seen all there was to see. Didn't touch anything, of course. I took another look at the broken knife in the chair, and the point lying in the drawer; and it occurred to me this chap might come back to get the pieces. But the knife was an ordinary sort; kind of a hunting knife. I've seen guides wear them in the woods. I didn't figure he'd be back. So when I was all set, I went to the telephone."

"There's no telephone there," Nell ejaculated. "I tried to get you, this evening."

"There's an instrument," he told her. "But it's been disconnected. I realized this soon as I tried it; the wire was dead. That made me hurry a bit, because it raised the question of how I was to get the word around. So I headed for the boathouse, on a run by that time. And then I slowed down, kind of hated to go away and leave—things as they were. But there wasn't anything else to do. I thought I'd have to get back to the landing, and then it occurred to me there might be a telephone on Big Dog; so I took the skiff I came here in, and rowed over there.

"That house was closed up; but I judged I was

justified in breaking in; so I stuck a rock through a pane of glass and opened a window, and sure enough the telephone was working." He smiled a little. "Probably I should have called the police first; but this was a chance for a big story. I knew they could get out a late extra and sell it to the theatre crowds; and the other papers would be caught more or less flat footed. And I didn't have anything to tell the police that meant hurrying at all. So I called the office first, and let them have all the dope; and then I telephoned the police up town here. The man I talked to had seen the two men that work out at Little Dog, just a few minutes before. Knew them, apparently. Anyway, he bolted out and stopped them and came back and told me they'd all be along pretty shortly. So I went back to Little Dog and waited for them to come."

"I wouldn't have stayed there alone for anything in the world," Nell declared. "You couldn't have hired me. I don't see how you dared."

He smiled. "I was—settled down, by that time," he explained. "But I didn't stay in the house. I sat on the front veranda and smoked cigarettes."

"How did you feel?" she demanded; and he said thoughtfully:

"Well, I hadn't taken time for lunch, and I

was pretty hungry. And I didn't feel like looting the pantry. So I just sat there and smoked. Didn't feel particularly nervous. It got dark, and I turned on some lights. Then the first thing I knew my cigarettes were all gone. I'd had pretty near a full package when I began. And then I heard the motorboat coming, and went down to the wharf to meet them, and the excitement commenced all over again."

"We saw them start from the landing," Nell explained. "I heard them tell Dill Sockford about it. That's how we knew."

He laughed. "They spread it, all right," he agreed. "They hadn't been there half an hour before there were a dozen boats hanging around, and a lot of people landing. I'd had an idea the summer folks were pretty near all gone home by this time of year; but they turned up, a lot of them, and natives, too. A regular mob. The house was full of them." He made a little gesture. "Not much chance of finding anything, of course, with them around."

"We thought Mr. Main might have gone over there, might have got off the train at Weirs and stopped there on his way up here," she explained; but he shook his head.

"No; no, I didn't see him," he declared.

Molly, who had been thus long silent, was

stirred by this, by his tone. "You know Paul?" she asked.

He turned to her then again, smiled reassuringly. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I know him. I met him—" He hesitated. "I've run into him around town, more or less. In the courts, you know." Paul was, in fact, an attorney.

"He was coming tonight," Molly explained. "I—can't help being a little worried. He wasn't on the train he meant to come by."

"I guess there's nothing to worry about," he suggested. "He probably got held up at the last minute, or missed the train, or something. Be along in the morning, won't he?"

Molly studied him thoughtfully; he was not, she felt sure, wholly frank. And she asked, after a moment, abruptly: "What do you think the—the man who killed her was looking for, Mr. Newbert?"

"Haven't a notion," he declared. "No, I haven't any idea, at all."

"Wasn't it curious," she suggested. "That you should come up to see her on this particular day. Out of all the days you might have come. Did you come to see her about—anything in particular?"

"Well," he explained. "You know these singers all have press agents, and they like publicity."

He added: "And of course, they're good copy, too. People like to read about them."

"I should think it would be—difficult," she suggested, "to sit down and interview a person when you didn't know what they ought to say. How do you think of questions to ask them?" She smiled faintly. "Or do you always ask them the same questions? How do they like the United States? And how do they keep their figures? And what face creams do they use? And what chance has an American girl in grand opera? And must she pay the price for success?"

He chuckled. "You've got it down cold," he agreed. "You could land a job with us, anytime."

"And I suppose you'd have asked her about her jewels?" she suggested idly, not appearing to look at him. But she saw, for all her seeming inattention, the stiffening of his features, the guard he set upon his eyes.

"Oh, yes," he agreed. "Yes, ask them anything; the more personal, the better."

"She had some lovely ones," Molly commented. "But she didn't bring them up here. If she had, a person might think he was after them."

"Yes, that's right," he assented uncomfortably.

"She wore beautiful rings," Nell interjected. "Always. I've seen them. Were they gone?"

Newbert shook his head. "Didn't seem to be," he said. "There were some on her fingers; and there were others, and a bracelet or two, and so on, earrings and things like that, in a box in her dressing-room."

"Had he found them?" Molly asked; and he nodded uneasily.

"Yes," he agreed. "Oh yes, they were scattered around."

Nell, who had been watching Molly, cried suddenly: "Molly, what are you trying to—to find out? Do you know anything about it?"

And Molly, after a moment's hesitation, looked at Newbert again, and she smiled. "You needn't be afraid of—alarming us," she told that young man. "I'm a grown woman, and not a particularly nervous one." She eyed him thoughtfully. "You must know Mr. Raleigh, too," she suggested.

He nodded, eyes attentive. "Yes."

"Have you—seen him lately?" Molly asked.

Newbert laughed uncomfortably. "You're all right," he applauded. "Yes; yes, that's the story. I had lunch with him and Mr. Main Tuesday, and they were talking—" He checked himself, looked at Nell. But Molly said quickly:

"It's all right." She smiled. "She's in it, now. She might as well know." She spoke to Nell directly. "Paul bought an emerald from Madame Capello, last week," she told Nell. "Bought it and gave it to me. I expect that is what this man— I expect he was looking for that." She turned back to Newbert. "That's what you think, isn't it?"

Nell cried quickly: "An emerald! Where is it, Molly? What makes you think. . . ."

"Upstairs," Molly said softly, with a little movement of her head; and Nell's eyes turned that way. But Newbert looked quickly at the naked windows all about them; and Molly saw his glance.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" he countered. "Do what?"

Molly smiled, watching him. "I—know something about it," she assured him. "Mr. Raleigh was with us the night we first saw the emerald. I could see at the time that—she was worried about it; half afraid of it. Mr. Raleigh said there was some story about it; or he said he had heard she had a stone that carried a story. But he couldn't remember what the story was."

Newbert hesitated. "He's been trying to dig it up," he explained, at last.

"I think," Molly said slowly, "that you knew about it, too. I have a feeling you came up to ask Madame Capello to tell you the story. Is that it? Was that how you happened to come?"

He said, after a moment, frankly: "Yes, you're right. You see," he explained, "we got on the track of things like this, get the whole story, maybe; but it isn't safe to print the things unless they come from headquarters. I was going to ask her some questions about it. I expected her to refuse to talk, or to deny the whole yarn; but even if she did I could print it and then say that she denied it, or that she wouldn't talk about it. Do you see?"

"But why," Molly asked. "Why did you come over here? To this island?"

He smiled. "Oh, didn't I tell you," he exclaimed. "I got lost. Just happened to turn up here, that was all. Might have rowed around the lake all night if I hadn't seen your lights."

Molly shook her head. "You're—a young man of one idea," she told him. "If you were a doctor, you'd never tell a patient he was seriously ill. But I know that something—it's perfectly plain—something made you think he—might come here. You came over to warn us, didn't you? Or was it just to ask some questions, perhaps to see the emerald?"

Newbert laughed uncomfortably. "You know, you're making it darned hard for me," he confessed. "I know how it feels, now, to be interviewed." He added with apparent frankness: "I expected to find Mr. Main here. Thought he might put me up for the night."

She shook her head. "You wouldn't come away from Little Dog for that. You'd stay there to keep an eye on things and make sure you found out whatever happened, for your paper. You wouldn't come calmly away from the island, just to look for a place to sleep. Would you?"

"I thought it was later," he reminded them. "It seemed later to me. It seemed as though I'd been there a long time."

She hesitated. "You're provoking," she told him. "And a little—inclined to patronize us. Probably because we're women. Most men are that way, I suppose. Patronize, and protect? I don't mind being protected. I'd as soon you were a dozen men, policemen, or soldiers or something. But I hate being patronized; and I hate being evaded. Why did you think he might come here, Mr. Newbert?"

Nell had been listening intently, watching them both, her eyes turning this way and that, from one to the other; the firelight on her face glowed like gold upon her brown skin; and her hair was

filled with little burning lights like fire. He caught her eye, and for a moment he was struck, poignantly, by her beauty, so that his throat filled. Their eyes held; and Nell must have felt how deeply the sight of her affected him; for after a moment she said in a low voice, friendly and reassuring:

"Tell her—Jim!"

He roused himself abruptly, wrenched his eyes away. And he looked at Molly and smiled. "Well—all right," he agreed. "It's guess work on my part. Maybe I'm wrong." He hesitated. "You remember, I said he'd opened some letters on her desk, letters all stamped and ready to mail?" Molly nodded. "Well, one of them was to a bank in New York," he explained. "She asked them to credit to her account a check which she had enclosed. She named the amount—nineteen hundred dollars. And the check was gone." He was a moment silent, then continued: "I thought it might be among the litter, and I looked all through the desk, and it wasn't there. So I wondered if this chap might not have taken it; and I wondered what it was, and then it occurred to me that it might be the check Mr. Main had given her, for the emerald."

Molly nodded. "It must have been," she agreed.

He met her eyes, then lowered his own. "It just

seemed possible he might figure that out," he explained. "And figure out that you had the stone, and come over here. I thought he'd probably come tonight, if he was coming; so I figured I'd come over and get Paul and we'd lay for him."

He ended; and for a little no one of them spoke, each weighing this possibility. Nell stirred, and left her chair and sat down beside Molly on the wicker seat before the fire, pressing against the older woman. Outside, the wind was increasing in violence, lashing among the branches of the trees; they could hear the water rebound against the mole before the house; and the windows rattled in their casings. The house, so quiet within, was surrounded by vast tumult; and after a moment Nell said nervously:

"He couldn't get here, a night like this. Unless he's got a mighty good boat."

"I'll tell you," Newbert suggested. "I'll take you two ashore, to some friends' house; and then I'll come back and keep an eye out for him here."

Molly shook her head. "We've only small boats and canoes," she explained. "The motorboat is out of water." She added: "Besides—I'm not going to run away. I'm not really afraid."

"I am," Nell asserted stoutly. "And I don't care who knows it."

Newbert said reassuringly: "There's no real

chance of his turning up here. But if he does, I'll undertake to handle him. You don't need to worry."

Nell looked at him. "Have you a pistol?" He shook his head; and she swung to Molly. "Get Paul's pistol for him, Molly."

Molly hesitated, and Newbert asked: "Where is it?"

"Upstairs," Molly explained. "In my room." She looked up toward the balcony that ran around the living-room; and it seemed to her a shadow moved there, quick as light. The living-room rose to the very roof; and the shaded lamps on the table shed no light so high. The upper part of the great chimney was half-invisible in the gloom there. Molly stared with wide eyes, trying to see again that moving shadow among the shadows; and Nell asked:

"What's the matter, Molly?" They all looked up toward the balcony, watching and listening.

And they all heard, vaguely, indefinitely, a little whisper of sound; a squeak, remote, seeming to come perhaps from the corridor that ran toward the rear of the house on the second floor. And Nell ejaculated:

"What was that?"

Molly shook her head. "I didn't hear anything!"

"I heard a step," Nell insisted; she looked at Newbert. "Didn't you?"

"Oh, a house as big as this is full of little noises," he reminded her; and he rose abruptly. "I'll go get the pistol," he offered. "If you'll tell me where it is."

"I'll have to get it," Molly replied. She rose. "It's upstairs," she said hesitantly. In her movement she dislodged the book on the arm of the seat and it fell to the floor with an impact disconcertingly loud. Newbert picked it up. Nell had been startled into a low cry; and Molly laughed and said in an amused tone: "Isn't it absurd the way things happen, when you're nervous anyway, to scare you."

"I'll tell you," Newbert suggested. "Why don't you two go to bed? Lock yourselves in your room. I'll stick around. I'm not planning to sleep much for a while, anyway. . . ."

Molly said whimsically: "There isn't a room that we can lock up, really; and they all have big windows. I don't feel at all like going to bed."

"I couldn't sleep a minute," Nell agreed.

Newbert considered. "We can fasten the outside doors, anyway," he suggested. "I'll just make the rounds and do that. Then we might all go upstairs, somewhere. It's so darned public in this

room, with the windows bare." He chuckled. "I feel like a bug under the microscope. We can leave the lights on down here, and then we'd see any one that came in."

"There's a master switch in our bedroom," Molly told him. "I can light lights all over the house from there."

"Fine," he assented. "And then if the wind goes down, and you want to, we can take a boat and get out of here." He rose. "Mind if I look around?" he inquired.

Molly and Nell followed him. They faced the dark arch that led to the billiard room; and Molly told him what lay beyond. "There are French doors on either side," she explained. "And an outside door to the left, in the closet beyond the dining room, and then on the right you go through the pantry into the kitchen."

"We'll go with him," Nell suggested quickly. And Newbert said:

"All right, let's stick together."

Molly fumbled for the button that illuminated the billiard room. "I'll turn on the lights," she offered; but he said:

"No, don't do that. If we're in the dark, we can see out better. I thought I'd look around. . . ." He uttered a low exclamation, then laughed. "This closet door's open," he explained. "It

swung a little, and touched my hand. Startled me."

The arch where they stood was in darkness, shadowed by the chimney which cut off the direct rays of the lamp. The two women stood in the archway while he went around the billiard table to the door on the north side; they could see, dimly, his attentive figure standing there; and after a moment they heard him turn the latch and try the door to make sure it was secure. Then he crossed to the south door; and it seemed to Molly she discovered a sudden rigidity in his posture as he approached it, a slowing of his gait, a stealth in his bearing. Abruptly he whispered something which they could not hear.

And then, with a movement swift and ferocious, he had flung wide this door and leaped through it and disappeared into the darkness outside. They heard him crash into the thicket there, and heard him cry out menacingly; and then there was a louder crash, and utter silence fell.

While they stood paralyzed, a vagrant current of air caught the door through which he had gone and swung it shut with a resounding bang; and they clung, trembling, in the archway there.

VII

AT the moment when Newbert thus wrenched open the south doors and plunged out into the thicket, the big house was for the most part dark; only the veranda light on the south side was still burning, and the lamp on the table before the hearth in the living room. But the thick chimney so completely shadowed the arch between living room and billiard room that Molly and Nell felt themselves somewhat sheltered and secure in this darkness. When Newbert opened the door, they had instinctively moved forward a pace; when the door slammed shut so resoundingly they recoiled and remained rigid there, watching with staring eyes for his return.

But through the glass of this south door and through the windows on that side they could see nothing at all. On the north the veranda light cast some radiance; the birch trees outside were ghostly white in its rays, as they bowed and swayed in the wind. But on the south the undergrowth was more dense; the evergreens cast heavy shadows; and it was impossible for the eye to pierce the gloom. So the two stayed where they were; and Nell clung to Molly with fingers

which gripped painfully; and Molly, though she was trembling, tried to steady her thoughts and to decide what might be done.

She cast, once or twice, a look around them; had an instinctive desire to draw back into some stronghold. But there were on every side, wide windows, unlocked doors; the whole house was singularly vulnerable. She remembered how this door through which Newbert had gone had slammed upon his heels; and she thought this must mean that there was, somewhere, an open door or window through which had come a pressure of air. She tried to remember what windows she and Dill had left open that afternoon; and she regained some measure of composure in this exercise, fruitless though it proved to be. There were open windows in her bedroom; but that door was closed. Elsewhere, she convinced herself at last, everything was secure. . . .

Nell was babbling at her side; and Molly could hear the girl's teeth click together. "Don't," she whispered. "Don't, Nell. Don't be frightened!"

Nell managed an unsteady laugh. "I'm not afraid, really," she protested. "But my teeth are, and my knees are."

"He isn't after you," Molly reminded her. "You haven't got his emerald."

"I'm not afraid for myself," Nell explained.

"But I—I hate anything's happening to Jim. And something has, Molly. Something has."

"He probably saw someone," Molly argued, "and he's chasing them."

Nell shook her head. "No, no," she insisted. "No, he's out there, on the ground. I know he is. Didn't you hear him fall?" She stirred. "Let's go out, Molly!"

Molly hesitated, drew back. "Out there!"

"We've got to help him," Nell insisted. "He came here to look after us, and we've got to stick by him, Molly." Inaction had left her shaken with fear, but the prospect of doing something nerved her; she grew momentarily bolder. "I'm not going to stay here," she cried.

"Wait," Nell whispered. "Wait, I'll turn on the porch light. Then we can see out." She crept back, and Nell followed her; and Molly found the button and pressed it, and the light on the south veranda glowed. . . . But neither of them was willing to appear in silhouette against the living-room door there; they withdrew and rounded into the billiard room again and crept toward one of the wide windows, kneeling on the window seat to peer out into the night. Paul's bag of golf clubs lay there on the seat and Nell felt them and drew out one of the clubs and gripped it in her hands.

"I'm going out, Molly," she whispered. "I'm going to take this and go out there. Take a club, and come with me. We can't leave Jim. . . ."

Molly was looking out of the window. The rays from the porch light lanced through the thicket from the side, illuminating a spot here and there, deepening in other places the shadows. "I can't see him," Molly protested. "I can't see him anywhere. . . ."

Nell hesitated, stopped just inside the door, scanning the underbrush. The ground on this side had never been cleared; there was a tangle of rose bushes and low shrubs, wild and uncontrolled, between the house and the path which ran along the shore. The two remained for a little thus intent; and it was Nell at last who called, softly, yet eagerly:

"There, Molly!"

Molly at the same moment had discovered movement; had seen something stir upon the ground. Something vague and indeterminate, moving ever so slowly. But this slow movement proceeded; she cried abruptly:

"He's there, on the path, Nell."

And at the word Nell wrenched open the door and took a swift step outside, and Molly came on her heels. On the door step, the two paused, looking all about them. Nell gripped Paul's putter

in her two hands; but Molly had forgotten to select a weapon. They watched, and they saw Newbert get laboriously to his feet; and he came uncertainly toward them, swaying. The light struck his face and there was blood across his cheek; he turned vague eyes upon them; and Nell ran to his side and caught his arm.

"Are you all right, Jim?" she demanded.

He looked at her in a dull fashion, mumbled something; and she shook at his arm.

"Are you all right?" she persisted. "What happened to you, Jim? You're hurt, Jim? Are you hurt much? Are you all right?"

To see him thus in distress acted as a stimulant upon them both, awakening in each the nursing instinct; the instinct to mend hurts and tend wounds and minister to misfortune. Molly took his other arm, said to Nell: "He fell, I think. He banged his head. Let's get him into the house. Don't try to make him talk, Nell."

Nell looked back to the spot where they had first seen him. "He tripped over one of those rocks," she guessed. "Probably hit his head when he fell." She spoke to Newbert, tenderly: "Come, Jim. You're all right now!"

They had each in fact for a moment the feeling that now all was well; the immediate urgency of caring for Newbert thrust into the background

those impalpable terrors which had a few moments before harassed them. So they moved with him toward the door of the billiard room, and got him inside, half supporting the man; and when they were within the door Molly left her post at his side to run and switch on the lights here; and she came back saying:

"Let's get him into the kitchen. There's hot water there. . . ."

Jim spoke intelligibly for the first time. "He got away," he said. "He ran away."

"Never mind, Jim. . . . Never mind now." Nell urged. "We'll have you fixed up in a minute." He stumbled on the steps that led up to the dining room level, and they had to support him; and they swung to the right toward the pantry doors and through, Molly pulling on the lights as they went. So presently they were in the kitchen; and the place, so immaculate and spotless, with a cluster of lights overhead, had curiously the air of an operating room in a well-ordered hospital. There was at one side a long table which the servants used for dining; they made Jim lie down there, and left him a moment while they hurried back into the other part of the house, and Nell got a pillow for his head, and Molly fetched iodine and collodion and gauze and bandages from the medicine closet by the side door.

She was so absorbed in these ministrations that it did not even occur to her to lock this side door when she passed it; she thought rather of how often she had thus sought medicaments for the small hurts which young Paul and Margaret were forever bringing to her to be mended. When she returned to the kitchen Nell was before her, lifting his head upon the pillow; and Molly saw that his eyes were clearing, that he was rational again. He managed, in fact, some sort of smile at her coming, and said ruefully:

"I'm a help, what?"

"Don't bother now," Molly told him soothingly. "Just lie still; turn your head a little." She examined the abraded wound on his temple; said to herself. "I'll have to cut the hair away; I'll get the scissors," and went back to the medicine closet again. When she returned once more, he and Nell were laughing together, uncertainly; and she smiled at them and said:

"That's fine! Now I'll fix you up."

So the two labored with him, briefly and deftly enough; for this was no novelty to Molly. She clipped the hair close over the wound, and said to Nell: "It's all right; it's not bad; it won't need any stitches."

Nell agreed; laughed at him mockingly. "If he were a woman he wouldn't pay any attention to

it," she asserted. "But a man always makes a lot of fuss about a little thing like that."

"That's all right," he said, in a whimsical tone. "From what I can see, it pays to make a fuss about it. This suits me, all right. Having you both so nice to me."

"Do I hurt?" Molly inquired. She was scrubbing the wound with gauze and hot water.

"Frightfully," he told her, with mock heroism. "But I'll grin and bear it. See me grin!" He did so, and Nell clapped her hand across his mouth.

"Don't," she cried. "You look like a death's head."

"Skull and cross bones," he laughed. "Deadly poison. Death to evil doers." And he chuckled to himself. "I was always the president of the awkward club," he commented. "A swell hero, what? Charging out of the house and bulging into a stone wall. Lucky it didn't kill me." He was lying on his back, and almost above his head there was the skylight which in the daytime filled the kitchen with sunlight, his eyes turned upon it, and held there for a moment, and the smile upon his lips, without changing, nevertheless stiffened. Molly saw this, and exclaimed:

"It hurts now, doesn't it? It will smart for a minute, that's all. It's the iodine."

"Ouch!" he agreed, in a perfunctory tone. "Sure does sting."

"Baby," Nell derided; and he grinned at her. But his eyes returned to the skylight again. Nell saw his glance and asked in a lowered tone: "What are you looking at?"

"I never saw a house so full of windows," he confessed. "They even have them in the ceilings. Not much privacy."

Molly was laying a small dressing across the wound, now bound it with applications of collodion. "There," she exclaimed at last. "That's a regular professional job."

"All but the hair cut." Nell laughed. "You ought to see yourself, Jim. You look terrible."

"I'll wipe the rest of that blood off," Molly explained. "Down on your cheek." She did so. "Now, do you feel like sitting up?" she suggested, and they helped him, and he slid off the table till he stood on the floor. "How do you feel?" Molly asked.

Curiously, after a moment, he laughed. "You'd be surprised," he declared.

"Why?"

"Well," he explained. "As a matter of fact, I'm hungry!" He added apologetically: "I haven't had anything to eat since breakfast; and I don't eat much breakfast."

Molly smiled at Nell. "I haven't had any supper myself," she confessed. "I never thought of it; never even offered you any. You must be starved."

Nell shook her head. "I had supper at six o'clock," she declared. "You two sit down," she added, drawing chairs to the table for them. "I'll have something for you in no time."

"There's probably no fire in the stove," Molly remembered. "I forgot to put any coal on today." But Jim lifted one of the lids and said:

"Yes, there is; we can bring it up." He rattled down the ashes; and the cheerful noise reassured them all, and the clatter when he added coal. Nell and Molly were in the pantry, brought out soup and a can of beans.

"Do we want coffee?" Molly asked; and added: "Or will it keep us awake?"

Nell said drily: "I don't think we're going to sleep very much anyway."

Molly laughed at her. "Pshaw, you're not still afraid, are you? I think we've been imagining things. Nothing's going to happen. I say let's have a bite to eat and then go to bed."

Nell looked at Jim. "What made you tear out of the house that way?"

Jim laughed. "I was seeing things, that's all," he confessed. "Had a notion I saw something

out there; and I thought if I charged out, I might get near enough to get hold of him. But there wasn't anyone there."

Nell reminded him accusingly: "The first thing you said was: 'He ran away'."

"Oh, I'd had a crack on the head," he pointed out; and Molly said briskly:

"Don't always expect the worst, Nell. Do you want beans or soup?"

"You sit down and let me do it," Nell insisted. "I was going to."

But in the end, of course, they all worked together. The fresh coal on the fire cooled it for a while, so that it was some time before the water boiled for the coffee; and when the beans were hot, the soup ready, Nell decided she was hungry enough to eat with them. "I feel as though I hadn't a bite for days," she confessed. They made of the affair something of an occasion; and their appetites seemed to increase, so that in the end they opened another can of beans. Then Molly found a can of sliced pineapples for dessert; and afterward they washed the dishes, laughing together over the small task. Newbert had by this time recovered from the effects of his fall; he laughed with the others. Molly asked him once:

"Do you feel all right? Dizzy, or anything?"

"Oh, I'm fine," he assured her. "I'm ready to tumble over another wall any day in the week."

Nell by and by brought the talk back to that which was uppermost in their minds by asking abruptly: "What kind of looking man did you see, Jim?"

Her tone was not lowered or guarded; and he said good-humoredly: "Oh, don't kid me about it, will you? Let's forget it. I think we've all been nerved up. I can see now it was foolish. Nothing's going to happen. We'll just go to bed, and laugh at it all in the morning."

"I'm getting a tremendous kick out of it," Nell insisted. "I rather like being scared to death. It never happened to me before."

"The only thing I don't understand," Molly confessed, "is Paul not coming. I am a little worried about him."

Newbert shook his head. "Wives are all like that," he assured her. "I'll bet Paul has been late before."

"He's usually awfully methodical," she declared.

"But he has been late, hasn't he?" he urged; and she agreed that this had sometimes happened. "There you are," he pointed out. "It's happened again, that's all. He probably missed the train."

"There's another one about half past ten," she said thoughtfully.

Newbert looked at his watch. "Well, it's almost eleven now," he told her. "How will he get here if he comes?"

"Dill said he'd bring him up," she explained. "Dill Sockford."

"The little old man down at the landing," Nell reminded Newbert; and the reporter nodded.

"He'll be turning up here the first thing you know, then," he predicted.

"It's blowing fearfully," Molly argued. "I don't know whether Dill's boat could make it. It's an awful little thing. He might have to wait for the wind to die down."

They had finished the dishes; and she gave a final look around the kitchen. "Lock this door, shall we?" she suggested.

Newbert nodded, crossing that way. "Might as well," he agreed. "But with the wind the way it is, nobody's likely to land here. If Paul can't get here, no one else can. Couldn't he telephone?"

"The phone's disconnected, or out of order, or something," Molly explained; and he smiled. Behind them he turned out the kitchen lights and those in the pantry. The dining-room and billiard-room were illuminated as they had been

left; and Molly said thoughtfully: "Why not leave these on? I've heard that—burglars hate a lighted house."

He laughed. "All right," he agreed. "If it makes you feel better."

Nell was ahead of them, in the arch that led to the living-room; and Molly and Jim were together a little way behind. The living-room was not so brightly lighted; only one lamp burned there. Against the shadow of the great chimney they saw Nell in pale silhouette; and they saw her now stop in an abrupt and rigid posture, her head turned upward. Instantly she darted back to them, eyes wide and lips rigid. She came to Jim, and clutched his arm; and Molly asked softly:

"What's the matter, Nell? What did you see?"

"Someone ran along the balcony," Nell whispered. "Ran like a flash, so quickly."

"Where?" Molly asked.

"Toward the front, from your room," Nell explained. "I caught a glimpse of him."

"A man?" Jim demanded.

"Yes, yes," she declared.

"Funny we didn't hear him," he said thoughtfully, "if he was running."

"I heard the floor squeak," Nell declared. "Two or three times."

Jim went slowly forward; and the two came at his side; and Molly said: "There's an upstairs veranda in front. He probably went out there. He could get up there. There's a pine tree on the mole he could climb, and reach the veranda rail."

"The door's shut, on that side," Jim commented. "If he'd gone out, we'd have heard the door, or felt the wind, anyway." He added a moment later: "You can hear it rattling when the wind hits it. Hear?"

"I don't care," Nell insisted. "I saw him. I don't care what you say. He came out of Molly's room and ran that way. . . ."

"Out of my room?" Molly repeated; and Newbert looked at her, and she said in a low tone: "It's in there."

"The emerald?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," she assured him.

He took a step forward. "I'll go up and look around," he decided; but Nell clutched his arm.

"Wait," she begged. "Wait." And she turned back to the window seat and got another golf club from Paul's bag there and offered it to him. He looked at it with a smile.

"Midiron?" he commented. "Wait a minute. Guess I'd rather have a niblick if there's one

there." He selected the club, weighed it in his hands. "All right," he said. "You two stay here. I'll just make sure there's no one upstairs."

"I'm coming with you," Nell declared.

He shook his head. "No sense in that," he urged. "There's no one there. You two sit down in front of the fire, and I'll have a look around. Paul ought to be here pretty soon, and then you can get to bed. . . ."

"I won't stay down here alone," Nell told him. "Will we, Molly?" she added, appealing to the older woman, sweeping her hand around the room. "There are too many windows and things here."

Molly tried to laugh. "If there was anyone here, he's at the other end of the island by now," she suggested.

"I tell you, I saw him," Nell protested. They were still within the arch; but at her words they all turned to look upward. And a moment later they had recoiled, scramblingly, with low cries. For something, incredibly swift, small and dark and silent, had sped past not a foot in front of them, fair before their eyes. Molly and Nell clung together and Newbert stood alertly, between them and the living-room, half crouching, eyes wide, the niblick ready in his hand. They watched him breathlessly; and after a moment they were as-

tonished to see the rigidity of his posture relax. He laughed a little, and turned and came toward them; and he chuckled at Nell.

"Sure you saw a man?" he challenged.

She nodded vigorously, half angry that her fears should be doubted. "Of course I did."

"And you heard the floor squeak under him?" he suggested.

"Yes I did!"

Molly asked quietly: "What is it, Mr. Newbert?" and he met her eyes, and explained in a gentle and reassuring tone:

"It's only a bat, Mrs. Main. He's flying around the chimney now, up near the roof; and you can hear him squeaking. He flew past our faces a moment ago. It's dark up there, and when you just see him move it is—startling."

"A bat?" Nell cried incredulously; but Molly smiled.

"Of course," she agreed. "There are lots of bats on the island. One of them must have got caught indoors somehow, or come down the chimney or something."

"But I'm terrified of bats!" Nell cried. "I'm a lot more afraid of them than I am of burglars. I'd lots rather have an imaginary burglar than a real bat. I can't go in there till you catch him, Jim."

He chuckled. "Won't hurt you," he assured her.

"I'm afraid he'll get in my hair."

He looked at her close-clipped head and smiled. "Not enough of it," he said teasingly; and she retorted:

"Just the same, you'll have to catch him."

He nodded. "Well, I'll have a try at it," he agreed. "Not much of a bat catcher, I'm afraid. Probably if I open a window up there, or a door, it will go out. I'll see." He chuckled again. "You said you were coming up with me," he reminded her.

"I never will," she retorted. "I'm going to stay right here."

Molly came to her rescue against him. "I'm as bad as she is," she confessed. "I could face a man, but I won't fight a bat in the dark for anyone."

"That's all right," he agreed. "You stay here, then." He left them together, in the billiard room, and passed through the arch and turned and ascended the stairs. The two drew insensibly together, their hands touching, their ears attentive. They could hear his slow steps as he paced along the hall above their heads.

VIII

NEWBERT had, since he first came to the island, played with some skill a certain rôle; he had assumed and sought to maintain a careless and a confident attitude, to conceal from the two below-stairs now his very definite apprehensions. The result had been in some degree to reassure them; but the reporter himself was under no illusions. The man responsible for the death of Madame Capello had shown himself to be not only wholly without human scruple, but also murderously mad; and Newbert had no doubt at all that this man would eventually make his appearance here. So while he sought to reassure Molly and Nell, he had at the same time maintained a strict vigilance; and he had sought to discover some device adequate for their protection. The wind which blew across the lake with undiminished violence gave them, he felt sure, a temporary security; it seemed unlikely that even a madman would drive a boat into unknown waters on such a night. But soon or late, probably toward morning, the wind would abate; and Newbert was reluctantly sure that when it did moderate, the other man would come.

When, while he was still on Little Dog, this guess at the madman's future movements first occurred to him, he had counted upon finding Paul Main here and upon his co-operation. It had not even occurred to him to borrow a pistol from one of the officers. If the idea had entered his mind he must have discarded it, since his fears were guess work, and not sufficient to justify him in bringing Paul and Mrs. Main into the notoriety that must follow the murder. So now he was unarmed, and the niblick in his hand seemed to him ridiculously inadequate as a weapon of defense against a man insanely murderous.

When he had left the two in the billiard room and started up the stairs, he felt curiously grateful to the bat for giving him this moment alone, this moment in which he could lay aside his mask of unconcern, rest from the effort to keep Mrs. Main and Nell heartened and reassured. He smiled at the thought, nodding a little, muttering to himself: "Look as scared as you feel, boy; it's the only chance you'll have!" It was a relief to be away from them, a relief to tighten his nerves, to flex his muscles, to glance watchfully right and left, to assume openly all the vigilance which it seemed to him the moment required. The comfortingly strenuous wind still blew out-

side. "But when it stops, I want a gun in my hand," he thought. "I wonder where he keeps it." And he reminded himself that he must somehow persuade Mrs. Main to give Paul's pistol to him before she went to bed. The minor mystery of Paul's failure to arrive recurred to his mind, but he dismissed it from his thoughts; whatever the explanation, there was nothing for the moment to be done about it. Enough responsibility already weighed upon him here.

While he moved to and fro in the upper floor of the house, inattentive, confident there was nothing to be discovered in these rooms, he harked back to that moment when he had plunged out into the thicket, trying to analyze the impressions which had led him to make that move. He had, as he approached the door of the billiard room, thought he saw a moving figure in the shadows among the trees there; when he stood at the door itself the figure had ceased to move. It might have been a stump, or the trunk of a tree. It was as much his own taut nerves as anything he actually saw which led him to rush out, shouting defiantly, charging at the motionless thing. Then he tripped and fell; and when his dizzy senses began to return, it seemed to him that the figure was gone. "But the chances are I didn't see a thing," he decided now. "If he was around

here, on the island anywhere, we'd have heard from him before this. Imagined it, I guess."

His imagination was, he realized, alert and overstimulated, entirely untrustworthy. Even at the moment, for instance, he had repeatedly the impression that someone was keeping just out of sight ahead of him as he went to and fro through the bed rooms on the upper floor. There were six or eight of them, with three bathrooms among them; and connecting doors led from room to room and from each room to the hall or to the balcony around the living-room, so that the place assumed in small degree the aspects of a labyrinth. He turned on the lights as he went, and left them burning behind him; and he looked into closets here and there, laughing at his own folly, yet for all his mild amusement keeping the niblick ready in his hand. And always when he entered a room he had that curious feeling that someone had slipped out of it just ahead of him; and now and again he looked quickly over his shoulder, as though he felt a presence behind him there.

Then he remembered the bat, and decided that it must be flying about; that its shadow, occasionally catching his eye, was responsible for this feeling of another presence here. So he gave his attention to the business of capturing or

destroying it. There was a single light in the ridge pole of the roof, high above the living room; and he tried various switches in the effort to turn this on, and called down to Mrs. Main at last to ask whether it could be lighted. She answered that the switch was beside the bed in her room.

"It's the master switch," she explained. "Lights one light in every room in the house."

He found it, and pressed it; and when he came out on the balcony around the living room again, he saw the bat circling the upper part of the chimney, saw it settle among the grotesque stones and boulders of which the chimney was constructed.

"I might climb up there from the mantel and catch it in my hands," he thought, and examined the curiously misshapen stones and saw that such an ascent would be an easy affair, if a dizzy one. But semi-darkness was more likely, he decided, to lead the bat into flight once more; and he turned off the lights, and saw it presently begin to wheel again. This suggested to him a device; he turned on the lights everywhere except in the narrow hall that led from the balcony toward the rear of the house, ending in a bathroom there. This he left dark; and he had at length the satisfaction of seeing the bat dart into it.

When cautiously he switched on the hall light the creature was nowhere to be seen; but it emerged momentarily from the bathroom door at the end of the hall, and darted back into the shadows there again; and with a bound he sprang along the hall and drew that door shut and latched it.

The two below stairs heard him running; and Molly called: "Did you get it?" He came back to the balcony, reassured them.

"I've got it shut in the bathroom at the end of the hall," he explained. "We can leave it there, can't we, and get it out in the morning."

"Are the doors all shut?" Molly asked. "There are three doors."

"I'll make sure," he told her; and he did so, entering the bathroom itself. The bat was clinging to the molding, and he might have killed it. Instead, he opened the outer window a little, and then turned off the lights again, and came out and latched the door behind him and returned to explain to them the measures he had taken. "It'll go out of doors now," he called confidently. "So we don't need to worry about that any more."

He was about to go downstairs, but Molly came up to meet him. "Wait a minute," she sug-

gested. "I'll get you Paul's pistol while you're up here."

He felt a great relief at this; but he said casually: "All right, if you like. But there's no need of it. I'm afraid I've—scared you unnecessarily."

Nell was at her heels. "You haven't scared us," she reassured him. "We were frightened to death before you came; but we're not afraid now."

He chuckled. "I notice you stick to the crowd," he laughed. "Don't see you wandering off by yourself very much."

"I like to know what's going on," she retorted.

Molly had turned toward the door of her room, and they followed her that way while she got Paul's tackle box from the closet and opened it. She handed Newbert the pistol. "And here are the loads for it," she explained, and gave him the full clips. "Do you know how to work it?" she asked.

He opened the action. "Yes," he assured her. "Yes." Turned the weapon in his hands, examining it. Nell was looking at it too; Molly was closing the tackle box to put it away again. Neither of them saw her take from it the little lacquer box in which the emerald lay. She slipped it into the pocket of the sweater she wore, and put the tackle box away and returned toward them. New-

bert was still handling the pistol; and she asked:

"Is it any good? Could you—do anything with that?"

"Oh yes," he declared. "Yes, these guns are all right. Shoot straight and hard." He put a clip in place. "Only trouble is they don't fit into a pocket," he explained. "The barrel's too long." He thrust the weapon inside his belt, under his coat. "I sha'n't be able to sit down now," he said laughingly. "It'll jab into my leg. Like having a poker for a backbone."

There was no suggestion of consternation in his tone; but there was in his heart something very like dismay. For in this examination of the weapon he had discovered that the firing pin was broken off, that the pistol was useless. It might, he told himself, serve to affright a timid man; was worth retaining, if for that chance alone. But he had a curious certainty that if the man he expected should come to the island, he would not be easily affrighted.

"More power to the wind," he thought. "I hope it holds till morning, keeps him away."

A gust struck against the windows at the moment with a fiercer violence; and Molly said: "I declare, I never saw it blow so hard, or so long. I'm afraid Paul can't get here, if he does come. Not in Dill's boat, anyway. If they started,

the engine would probably stall and they'd drift away down the lake or somewhere."

"He could get some other boat," Nell urged; but Molly shook her head. "Probably everybody's asleep," she reminded the girl. "Or gone over to Little Dog." She added thoughtfully: "Let's go down and see if we can see him coming. He ought to be here by now, if the train was on time."

"I turned on all the lights upstairs here," Newbert pointed out. "Want to leave them on. It won't do any harm."

"Yes," she agreed. "Yes, every light in the house. Anyone outside can see in; but I'd rather have them see in without my knowing it than have it dark inside here and be able to see out and see them." She turned toward the stair, started down. "Let's go out on the mole," she suggested, and crossed the living-room toward the door that led that way. Nell and Newbert followed her; and it seemed to Newbert there was something like a purpose in her movements, that they meant much more than a mere desire to discover whether a boat was coming up the lake. He watched her covertly and curiously.

But outside, standing together by the fountain while the wind lashed at them and little gusts of

spray wetted their cheeks, she looked down the lake, betrayed no other interest. Nell, more weather wise than the other two, studied the clouds overhead.

"The wind's going to change," she suggested. "Or die down, pretty soon. I can see the stars. . . ."

"I don't see any lights," Molly said thoughtfully. "I guess he isn't coming tonight," she decided. "It's so late now. We might as well go to bed."

Newbert agreed to this. "You're wise to do that," he assured her, still watching her. "It's the thing to do."

She turned to look at him, her hands in the pockets of her sweater. "Oh," she said, looking past him. "You know I told you a man could climb up on the second floor veranda, out here. See that pine tree; he could go up that."

Newbert swung about and saw that this was true. "But it's a hemlock," he told her smilingly. "Not a pine."

"I call all evergreens pines," she explained casually, and passed him, going toward the house. They climbed the steps and went in together. He felt vaguely mystified, was conscious of a satisfaction in her bearing, a contentment for which he could not account. They came in and stood

before the fire. It was dying now, and Nell put a fresh log on.

"We're going to bed," Molly protested mildly.

"Well, Jim will be sitting up," Nell retorted. She looked at the young man. "Does your head hurt much?" she asked. "I should think it would ache fearfully."

"I'd forgotten it," he confessed with a grin. "No, doesn't bother me at all."

"It will when you look in a mirror," she told him derisively. "You're a sight. Molly may be a good surgeon, but she's not a very neat one."

They all laughed at that; and then Molly said definitely: "Well, I'm going to bed. I'm not going to make a fool of myself any longer."

"That's right," Newbert assented. "The thing to do."

"I'm going to sleep in your room," Nell announced. "You needn't expect to put me off by myself, Molly."

"Of course," Molly agreed.

Newbert, still perplexed by something in Molly's demeanor, tried a shot in the dark. "Don't you want me to take charge of the emerald?" he suggested. "Look out for it for you?"

Molly shook her head; but he thought she flushed faintly. "Oh, it's put away," she said

casually. And she added with a laugh: "I'd almost forgotten about it. Now you've reminded me!"

Newbert protested: "I'm sorry!" And Nell cried:

"Show it to me, will you, Molly? It must be wonderful! Is it worth a great deal of money?"

Molly smiled. "No, no, it's not very big. Mr. Raleigh said it wasn't worth more than two or three thousand dollars."

Nell looked disappointed. "Is that all?" she protested; and after a moment she exclaimed: "But would anyone kill Madame Capello for so little as that, Jim?"

Newbert hesitated. "They say you can hire a murder done for two hundred and fifty dollars in some places," he reminded her. "And—this may be worth more than Mr. Raleigh thought."

Molly looked at him attentively. "I'd forgotten," she remarked. "You said there was some story about it. . . . Do you know what it is?"

"Oh, let it wait till morning," he urged. "You'll be wide awake again, if we start talking now."

Nell threw herself down on the seat before the fire. "I'm not going to bed till I hear it," she declared. "If it takes till daylight." She shivered ecstatically. "I never had such a night, Molly. I never was so thrilled."

Molly smiled at her. "Tell us about it, Mr. Newbert," she directed. "I'm not so sleepy as I thought I was."

He said, reluctantly yet unable to deny them: "Well—I only know the outline, you might say. Raleigh told me. He's checking up the details, and that's partly what I came up to see her for. But he thinks it is a very old stone. There's an emerald that answers that description, and it was stolen, in Rome, twenty years or so ago. The story is, that it used to belong to Lucrezia Borgia. . . ."

"The one who poisoned people?" Nell exclaimed; and Newbert smiled.

"Raleigh says she wasn't quite so bad as she's supposed to be," he replied. "Anyway, that's the tale. And Madame Capello was just about making her début in Rome at the time it disappeared." He hesitated, moved his hand in a vague gesture. "It's rather intangible. Anyway, if it's the same emerald, there's a big reward for it's recovery. Some Italian nobleman owned it; and he's pretty wealthy, and anxious to get it back. That's all a matter of record, fairly well known among the big jewelers, I guess. They were on the lookout for it for years, but the affair had been pretty well forgotten. Raleigh's interested in things like that, you know; he's dug it up again."

"But he advised Paul to buy it if he could," Molly protested.

Newbert hesitated. "I told you I had lunch with them, didn't I? They were talking about it then; and Raleigh said he didn't actually advise Paul to buy it. Paul asked him what it was worth, and he gave him some estimate of its commercial value." He checked himself for a moment, sat still and intent as though he were listening; but they were absorbed in what he had been saying and did not remark this; and he added hurriedly: "Of course, it's worth a lot more than that to a collector, or to this chap who owned it!"

Molly said quickly: "And you think whoever killed Madame Capello was after it? For the reward?"

He did not immediately reply, lowered his eyes as though to choose his words; but his thoughts were racing, seeking some evasion. He was saved from answering by Nell, by her swift cry: "But Molly, I should think you'd be afraid to keep it! I should think you'd be terrified. If it's worth so much money, there'll be all sorts of burglars and people after it, when they know where it is."

"I don't want to keep it after this," Molly agreed. "I'll—be rather glad to get rid of it, I think."

"Well, you can make a profit on it," Newbert told her, smiling; and she nodded.

"You sound exactly like Paul," she commented. "That's the way he talked when he bought it. I think he just bought it because it was a bargain." She got to her feet; and Nell asked swiftly:

"But how did they find out Madame Capello had it, Jim?"

Molly said, interrupting: "I don't think I—want to hear any more tonight, Nell. Let's go to bed!"

Newbert, during these last few minutes, had been increasingly ill at ease; he caught at this suggestion eagerly. "That's right," he exclaimed. "Go ahead to bed, you two." He added unconvincingly: "That's practically the whole story, anyway."

Nell protested: "I'm not a bit sleepy."

"You never will be till we get to bed," Molly argued; and Nell got unwillingly to her feet.

"Will you show it to me when we get upstairs?" she begged. "I'm wild to see it, Molly."

Molly smiled at her. "You shall," she promised. "But not tonight. It's prettier by daylight." She nodded to the reporter. "You've been—a comfort, Mr. Newbert," she told him. "I sha'n't worry, knowing you're here."

His attention had been, curiously, elsewhere; but when she spoke his name he came quickly to his feet, smiling reassuringly. "That's fine," he agreed. "You're right, too. There's not a thing. . . ."

They moved toward the stair and ascended, and looked down at him from the balcony to say good night; and he answered with a word. Then the two went into Molly's room and closed the door; and he was left alone, below, before the fire.

When the door closed behind them, muffling their voices, he stood a moment motionless; then insensibly his posture changed, his head turned in the attitude of one listening, and with a glance behind him he crossed toward the door that led out upon the mole. Without opening the door, he tried to look out into the darkness; and failing in this he turned the knob and stepped outside.

The waves were still breaking against the rock-work about the mole; but in the moment that he stood there he assured himself that their impact was no longer delivered with such battering force. His ears had warned him, a little while before; all his senses now confirmed this warning. The wind, which had been their shield and buckler, was beginning to die.

IX

NEWBERT stayed for a little while on the narrow front veranda, the mole extending into the lake before him, the big house at his back. He made some scrutiny of his surroundings, curious and intent, his senses alert, his nerves poised. The mole was perhaps thirty feet long, rounded at its outer end; and about its circumference there extended a low parapet of rough and jagged boulders, wide enough so that along the top there was space for loam among the rocks; and petunias had been planted here. The fountain, with its basin filled with water, the goose not spitting now, stood in the middle of the open space; around it there was firm smooth sand. Four steps led from the veranda down to this level; and just beside the steps was the hemlock tree by which, as Molly had pointed out, an active man might gain access to the second floor veranda, and so if he chose reach the balcony which ran around the living-room. Newbert studied it, grinned ruefully.

"Never saw a house where they made it so easy for a second story man," he remarked to

himself. "And not a decent lock on a door or window in the place, I suppose."

The wind was perceptibly decreasing in violence; he decided that in a very short time now, even a small motor boat could cross the lake in security. The idea that the madman would come as soon as the wind relaxed had taken such a firm hold upon him that he accepted it as fact.

"That means," he decided, "that I've got half an hour or so to spare, to look around." And with the thought he rounded the veranda and came to the south side of the house.

It was in his mind to look outside the billiard room door, discover whether there was in that locality any stump or tree which, dimly seen, might wear the semblance of a man. He came to the spot and could find nothing of the kind; and he went into the billiard room and extinguished the lights and peered out, trying to check up his former impression. It seemed to him certain that he had, earlier in the evening, seen something in the shadows which was not there now. This puzzled and disturbed him; he could not believe that if the man who had killed Madame Capello was on the island, they who were in the house would have gone so long undisturbed; and he was inclined to blame his own lively imagination, aroused now to an unusual sensitiveness. It

seemed impossible that he could have seen anyone here.

Continuing on his way, he rounded the rear of the house and the kitchen wing; and he saw that an active man might from the ground reach the roof over the kitchen. This discovery made him remember a fact that had, in the confusion of his own mind, escaped his thoughts. Lying on the kitchen table while Molly and Nell tended his hurt, he had seemed to see a face at the skylight over their heads, peering down at them. The impression was only momentary, not tangible nor complete. Yet there had been about it something vaguely familiar; and he tried to remember now what this was.

"A man with a cap on," he told himself gravely. "Rather a ridiculous cap. Plaid.'

And then he realized that by the association of ideas he had been led into error. His mind's eye could see so clearly this man with the amusing cap; but he remembered now that he had seen such a man, a few days before, in the restaurant where he and Raleigh and Paul were lunching together. The man had come in and sat down near them; and thereafter they lowered their voices so that he might not hear what they said. But his face and this cap had fixed themselves upon Newbert's mind. He laughed at his own

fears now; decided that the face at the skylight had been imaginary; that his subconscious memory had substituted for it the face of this man with the ludicrous cap. . . .

Completing his circuit of the place—the house blazed with light, so that his way was all illumined—he came under the wide windows of the room where Nell and Molly were going to bed. Their lights were on; but as he drew near these were switched off, and a moment later from above his head Nell called:

"Oh, it's you, Jim! Thank goodness! We heard someone."

He laughed reassuringly. "Just taking a breath of air," he explained. "Go to sleep, why don't you?"

"We're going," she assured him. "Good night again."

There was, just outside one of their windows, a poplar tree growing to the level of their room; and he remarked this. But it seemed to him unlikely that anyone could climb this tree and reach the window; the space between was too considerable. The leaves, already stiff with cold at the approach of fall, jerked to and fro in the slackening wind with a little tapping sound.

He went back into the house then; and he tried to lock the outer doors, and the windows. There

were keys in some of the locks, but at other doors he had less satisfaction; and the door by which he himself had entered on his arrival, the door on the north veranda, had a broken pane of glass just beside the latch, where it had blown against the table a moment after he came into the house. His survey of the place complete, he grinned regretfully.

"If anybody's coming, they can get in, all right," he decided. "So it's up to me to figure out what to do about it then."

He again examined Paul's pistol, drawing it from its place in his belt; made sure that the firing pin was broken, the weapon useless. It was hopeless to attempt to make it workable.

"But I've got to have some kind of a weapon," he thought; and he turned toward the kitchen with a notion of selecting a stout knife, or perhaps a cleaver. There were knives enough, but they were either small, for paring vegetables, or long and flimsy carving blades, fit to break at the least use. On the porch outside the kitchen door, however, he found an axe, dulled and good only for splitting. This he kept with him, took it with him back into the house when he returned to the billiard room. There the pool table caught his eye, and the balls in their rack upon it; and he smiled.

"Used to be able to throw a baseball," he re-

minded himself, and took half a dozen of the balls, as many as his pockets would comfortably hold, and bestowed them about his person. An hour or so ago, going upstairs to destroy the harmless bat, he had borne a niblick in his hand; and this, he remembered now, was on the seat before the fire; and he went back into the living room and picked it up again, hefting it in his right hand, the axe in his left.

"I look pretty warlike," he told himself in grim amusement. "But I'm afraid I'm not as good as I look."

Nevertheless, the feel of these things gave him some confidence and courage, helped him to face with bolder front whatever might befall.

It was the niblick in his hand which made him think of the bat; and thinking of it, he indolently raised his eyes toward the high rafters above the living-room. What he saw there gave him a start of unpleasant surprise; and as he realized its significance, his posture stiffened with dismay. For the bat was there again, the same creature or another one, flying in arrow-like circles around and around the big chimney. And he had locked the bat securely in the bathroom at the end of the upper hall.

With the thought he bounded up the stairs and into this hall at the stair top. The bathroom

door was shut; but when he approached it he saw that it was not latched, that it had been opened. It occurred to him as possible that the latch had slipped, that the door had opened of itself; but when he latched it again it appeared to be secure. He thought grimly:

"There may be someone in the house right now. The place is big enough!" He opened the bathroom door and saw the casement window there, which he had left ajar; and when he looked out it was to discover the kitchen roof just below the sill.

"A man could get in that way," he confessed; and his hair prickled a little on the nape of his neck, and he drew back warily, retreating along the hall.

In his former investigations among the rooms here, he had found that from Molly's room there were two exits; the door which opened on the balcony, and another way through a bathroom into a bedroom adjoining. He looked into this bedroom—the lights were burning as he had left them—and tried the bathroom door and found that it was locked on the inside; and this reassured him. At least no one could come at the two women by this way without an alarm. He considered searching the upper floor for the possible intruder, decided against this.

"He'd have the advantage, then," he reminded himself. "Be able to get at me from behind." And it seemed to him wise to select a vantage point from which he could keep watch and ward, and where at the same time he would be reasonably safe from a surprise attack.

To find such a post was not so simple a matter as it seemed; he had difficulty in discovering any corner where he would be secure against the approach from the rear. In the living-room the enormous chimney was so bulky that an enemy might easily hide behind it; no matter where the reporter stayed, he must watch both sides of it at once; and there were always the windows on every hand. There were windows everywhere; the whole lower floor was walled with them. He must go upstairs to escape their espionage.

But even above stairs the matter was not easy. He had already convinced himself that a man might enter the house either by way of the kitchen roof and the bathroom, or by climbing the hemlock in front. From that rear bathroom an intruder could without being seen go into the bedroom on either side; and on the south side, keeping in the bedrooms and passing from one to another, a man might reach the balcony above the living-room without ever appearing in the open hall. There was no easy way to block the

doors which connected the rooms along that side; and to turn out the lights would be to lend the cloak of darkness to such a marauder's movements.

Besides these available entrances over the kitchen roof or by way of the front veranda, there were two flights of stairs, starting at opposite sides of the living-room and meeting on the balcony. The balcony itself was the logical place, Jim saw at last, for him to stay; but even so, his view of a portion of the living-room below was cut off by the balcony beneath his feet; and wherever he stood or sat he must be visible through the windows on the opposite side of the room.

"They could take a shot at me as easily as at a blackbird," he told himself. "Like a canary in its cage; that's me!"

In the end he decided to concentrate upon the necessity of protecting the two women; and with this in view he went along the balcony on the side where they were, and opened the outer door, the door that led to the second floor veranda. With a glance he satisfied himself there was no one here; the wind had by this time quieted to such an extent that no man could climb the hemlock without making a noise that would be audible. And from a spot just within the doorway

Jim was able to watch the stairs, and the rear hall, and to see any movement there before he himself was in immediate danger of attack at close range.

This, in the end, was the measure he adopted; and for greater security he lay along the floor, the axe and the niblick ready to his hands, the pool balls heavy and awkward in his pockets. His body was on the balcony within the living room, his legs trailed on the veranda outside. The wind blew about him, persistent but dying rapidly; the tumult of the waters slowly stilled. His sense of humor made him grin at his own precautions, but he did not relax his vigilance. He lay there, and the bat wheeled tirelessly about the chimney, almost over his head. . . .

The young man lay still for a while, and then his muscles became somewhat cramped and he changed his posture; and this movement on his part seemed to him astonishingly noisy, so that he realized for the first time how quiet the night was become. Outside, along the shore by the bathing beach, the waves, shrunk to ripples now, lapped and splashed with a gentle, rhythmic sound, curiously suggestive of footsteps, as though someone walked along the shallows in the edge of the water. The sound was so persistent that Newbert at last rose and looked over

the veranda rail; and he could see, dimly, the lighter color of the sand along the water, could see no one was there.

When he returned to his post, he sat on the floor, instead of lying down; and he heard an occasional murmur of voices from Molly's room. They were not going to sleep, after all; but they were better off abed, out of the way of whatever was to come. Then he laughed at himself and thought his precautions all absurd.

"A fuss about nothing," he told himself severely. "You'll feel like a fool in the morning." And this led him to look at his watch. It was half after twelve; and he was surprised to find the night was so little sped, and he wound the watch carefully to make sure it was not run down.

As the silence thickened, little sounds hitherto unnoticed made themselves heard. A scurrying somewhere in the walls, a mouse or a rat disporting there; a squeak from the bat; a little ruffling of the pages of a magazine on the table below, turning over in the vagrant air currents which played through the big room. Toward the rear of the house a board creaked, as though under weight stealthily applied; but though Jim's vigilance was thereafter for a space heart-breaking, and he watched the end of the upper hall with

staring eyes, nothing happened, no one appeared. Then he remarked the fact that the door of the big south bedroom, opposite Molly's room, was closed; and he got up and went around the balcony and opened it and returned to his post. With the door open, he could from where he sat see into that room; might thus have warning of anyone's presence there. He was pleased with this measure, amplified it by returning to the room again and shifting a dressing table so that its mirror reflected the bathroom door; and when he was back at his vantage once more he found it possible to watch this bathroom door without shifting his position at all.

"Now," he decided, with some satisfaction. "Now I've got the place pretty well covered. I can see what's coming, anyway, and before it comes."

He heard, a little later, movement in Molly's room, and voices there; and then the door of this room opened. He watched regretfully, sorry they were coming out again; but he was not wholly sorry when he saw that Nell came out alone and closed the door behind her. She looked around, and at first did not see him; and he spoke to her.

"Here I am," he said.

She gave a little exclamation. "Oh!" Then dis-

covered where he sat, and laughed, and came and huddled at his side. She had put on a woolen bathrobe belonging to Molly, over her night dress; her feet were in slippers, her ankles bare. She hugged her knees and leaned her shoulders against the wall, settling herself comfortably. "I'm going to sit with you for a while," she explained. "I can't go to sleep anyway."

Her voice was low, and his, when he answered, was as low as hers. "No need," he said. "I don't mind."

"I should think you'd want company," she told him. "I would in your place."

"It's—pleasant," he agreed. Her throat was bare, the soft border of her nightgown visible between the folds of the bathrobe. "I haven't had time," he confessed, laughing a little, "to realize how nice you both are to me. Patching up my head and all, after I've scared the life out of you. I've made a fool of myself, probably."

"You must have a lot of adventures," she commented. "Reporters do, don't they? This is probably an old story to you."

The light from below was reflected in her hair, and he said gently: "This isn't an old story to me." Something in his tone caught her attention, and she met his eyes, and after a moment she smiled. They talked then of indifferent things

for a while; and once, outside, high in the air, something cried out, startling them both.

"That's a heron," he said as she clutched his arm. "One of these big blue herons."

"Of course," she agreed. "I've heard them. But it scared me for a moment."

"You can hear so many things on a still night," he assented.

"There's a poplar tree outside Molly's window," she told him. "And the leaves on it keep tapping in the wind; they sound exactly like a dog trotting. A big dog." She shivered, and then laughed. "I got up twice to look, to make sure," she confessed. "Till Molly laughed me out of it. She's a wonder, isn't she? Doesn't seem to be a bit scared."

"Sensible," he agreed. "She's probably gone to sleep now, where you ought to be."

"I wanted to hear more about the emerald," she told him. "Molly wouldn't show it to me. I think she's hidden it somewhere. There was more, wasn't there, that you didn't tell?"

He hesitated, lulled into security, a little sleepy, though his senses were still alert; and the fragrance of her hair came to his nostrils. Their heads were very close together; they were relaxed and inattentive. "I suppose so," he agreed.

"Why do they think this is the same one?"

she asked. "The one that belonged to—that Borgia woman? Just because it's like?"

He shook his head. "It's an old story, but new too," he explained. "No one, no one who knew jewels, had ever seen this emerald till Mr. Raleigh did. As far as anybody knows. Some of her friends knew that Madame Capello had an emerald that she kept always with her; that was all."

"And Mr. Raleigh thought he recognized it."

"He'd read up the old records," Newbert explained. "You know there's a lot of literature about famous jewels that have been lost. This is really one of the minor ones; but he remembered the circumstances. And he knew Madame Capello was in Rome at the time it disappeared. She was just making her début then. And he's been digging back, trying to connect the thing up."

"To prove she—stole it?" she asked; but he shook his head.

"No; no, that isn't the idea. But there was a man in love with her, a goldsmith, a designer. You know, a genius in his way, like Cellini. . . ." He broke off, listening; and his silence caught her attention.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Those poplar leaves," he remarked. "You can

hear them from here. They do sound exactly like a dog, like a dog trotting, don't they?"

"Isn't it weird?" she agreed. "It gave me the cold shivers to listen to them. That's why I came out here with you." She hesitated; and the silence of the big house settled down upon them once more, with an effect curiously crushing, so that she stirred as though to shake it off, and crept closer to his side. "Tell me about the man," she urged.

He nodded. "You understand, I'm guessing now. So is Raleigh. But anyway, this man was re-setting the emerald when it disappeared. He said he lost it. Stuck to it that he'd lost the stone. And of course it went pretty hard with him."

"Did they put him in jail?" she asked.

"Yes; yes, for years. And the chances are he was treated pretty badly. It wasn't just a question of punishing him; they wanted to get the stone back. Chances are, if they were satisfied he knew where it was, they'd treat him with a good deal of cruelty, try to break him down. But as far as Raleigh can find out, he never said anything except that he had lost it."

"Is he still in jail?"

"No," he confessed. "No, they turned him loose five or six years ago. Raleigh thinks they

had an idea of following him, watching him, hoping he'd lead them to the emerald. But apparently he got away, lost them. There's been no report on him for almost four years. He was in England, then, teaching Italian in an English school. An educated man, you understand. He stayed there about a year, and seemed to have settled down, and then one morning he didn't appear, and his rooms were empty, and that's the end of him, as far as they're concerned." He added abstractedly: "His name was Vinik."

"Vinik?" she repeated. "How funny!"

"Sounds Russian, or Polish, or something, doesn't it?" he agreed. "But that's what it was."

For a while neither of them spoke; they sat relaxed, heads resting against the wall, and their shoulders were touching. Before them on the floor lay the axe and the niblick; against her side she could feel the protruberance formed by the pool balls in his pocket, and she put her hand down to touch them, asked idly:

"What have you got them for?"

He chuckled, explained. "I used to be able to throw pretty straight," he told her.

She looked at the axe and the golf club. "Everything but the kitchen stove," she murmured in amusement; and then she stirred with

a new thought. "But you don't need—all these, when you have the pistol?"

He hesitated, then said frankly: "As a matter of fact, it's not good for much."

"Too small?" she suggested.

"Broken," he explained.

She received this almost indifferently. The hour had lost for both of them all reality; they sat dreaming, indolent, remote, like spectators at the drama that went forward. Terror long continued loses its edge; and they were no longer bitten by fear.

"I'm pretty strong," she said at last.

"I know you are," he agreed. "I saw you handle that canoe."

"I'll take the golf club," she suggested, and looked at him and smiled. "I'll crack him on the shins, and you bust him in the bean!" Her tone was one of mock ferocity; and he laughed with her.

"Got to catch him first," he reminded her.

They were still again for a space; and she asked by and by: "You think it was this—this Vinik, don't you?"

"I—smell a story in it," he agreed. "I suppose so, yes." He hesitated, added in an expository tone: "I figure he poled his boat in and landed on the south side of Little Dog, and came nosing

around. He'd probably seen the men servants go away. And the maid saw this big dog of his, and got scared and got out of there. That's my guess. And then he went in the house, and he and Madame Capello probably had a row, an argument, something. . . . I don't know just what. And she tried to get away, and that made him mad, and he killed her."

He added, a moment later: "He's crazy, I should judge. Must be!"

"I expect," said Nell dreamily, "he still loved her, and she wouldn't love him. So I expect he's killed himself now, Jim. I think that's what he's done. . . ."

He nodded indifferently. "Probably," he agreed. "Or maybe he got drowned, his boat got sunk in this storm, this squall tonight. It's blown great guns."

"But it's stopped now," she pointed out. "There's hardly any wind at all."

There was for a little no further speech between them; and by and by they heard movements, a footstep in the room where Molly was; and Nell touched his hand.

"Molly's not asleep," she whispered. And she giggled nervously. "I'll bet it's those leaves, tapping," she declared. "I'll bet she's gone to look out the window again."

He assented with a faint nod; but a moment later they were both sitting erect and alert. For they heard Molly return from the window, swiftly, and her door opened, and she spoke in a whisper.

"Mr. Newbert!"

Jim came to his feet with a bound, to her side; and without words she caught his hand. She was breathing tensely, and her fingers clutched his with a convulsive grip. She led him into the room, toward the window; and he felt Nell catching at his arm. Thus they reached the window side by side, and looked out and down. The light on the veranda illumined for a little way the ground about the house, beneath the birches and the hemlock trees; they could see a rod or two along the path toward the boathouses in the cove.

The dog was there, on the path. They saw him plainly. A tremendous creature, like a wolf, with a heavy gray coat, and tail deeply furred, and pointed ears and a long, punishing muzzle. He was, at the moment they approached the window, trotting away from the house; but in their movements they must have made some small sound, for the beast stopped, and turned, and looked up at them with a fixed glare, his eyes reflecting redly the veranda light. Newbert saw his lips twitch up and back in a soundless snarl.

Then from somewhere beyond, an indeterminate distance, there came to their ears a low, shrill whistle; and the dog heard and turned his head, and a moment later, with a leaping bound, was gone.

X

THIS moment when Molly fetched them to her window to look out at the great dog on the path below must have been between one and two o'clock in the morning, the threshold of that hour when the forces of mind and body are at lowest ebb, when old folk lying ill are like to die. The three had been since dusk under the stress of a terrific nervous excitement mixed with fear; they were weary with the storm of their own emotions, unfit for sleep yet aching for its anodyne, like taut wires strung to such a pitch that a touch may send them jangling into shattered and explosive bits. Their senses were preternaturally acute to least impressions, yet at the same time their emotions were dulled and in abeyance. They saw and perceived and understood, without feeling the natural reaction to their discoveries. It is impossible for the human mind fully and instantly to comprehend the great catastrophes of life; perception comes slowly, in minute doses, over a period of days or years; and thus the heart is spared those terrific blows which would destroy it. There is always springing hope,

deceptive yet heartening, to deny or mitigate the truth all too apparent. Thus though now they saw the dog on the path outside, and though they heard that low whistle from the direction of the cove, they refused wholly to believe. After the first moment of paralyzed attention, Nell said quickly:

"It was just a dog!"

And Molly, nodding hurriedly, spoke through clenched teeth. "A stray dog," she agreed. "A police dog!"

They sought to explain its presence there. "Probably some boat stopped for shelter in the channel, during the squall," Nell urged. "And it got away and they couldn't call it back again."

"I heard a whistle," Molly reminded them.

"Some bird, singing in its sleep," Nell insisted. "I didn't hear anything, did you, Jim?"

Newbert had been leaning forward, his fists upon the window sill, peering into the darkness beyond the rays of the porch light. He hesitated a moment before answering; and then he said honestly:

"I heard it. Yes. I heard a whistle."

"There's been a stray dog around," Molly argued. "Dill told me about it this morning. Folks have seen it, on the mainland."

"Deer swim across the lake," Nell added. "I've

seen them; I saw one this summer. They go from one island to the next. Why couldn't a dog?"

Molly had turned to the window again, there beside Jim; and Nell leaned on her shoulder, and for a moment they all looked out into the night. Beneath her hand Nell felt Molly's shoulder bare and cold and trembling; and she said urgently: "Molly, go back to bed, or get something on. You'll freeze!"

"I'm not c-cold," Molly insisted.

"You will be," Nell urged. Newbert, hearing, realized for the first time how scantily Molly was dressed; and he kept his eyes upon the path outside. But he added his advice to Nell's.

"Yes, put something on," he agreed.

Molly laughed uncomfortably. "I don't believe we really saw anything at all," she declared. "I think we're all too sleepy to see. My eyes are half shut. I can't keep them open."

"I'm not a bit sleepy," Nell declared. "That's the last thing in the world. . . ."

"It was a dog, all right," Jim assured them. He hesitated, then added. "No use trying to fool ourselves." His tone was almost apologetic, and for a moment neither of them spoke. Then Molly said steadily:

"Of course!" And she added: "We're not children, whatever happens. Let's not be absurd."

Yet none of them made a move to leave the window. They were held there, hypnotized; their eyes ached with the effort to see. "I think it's getting lighter," Nell said at last. "It must be nearly morning."

Newbert looked at his watch. "Twenty after one," he replied; and she said protestingly, laughing:

"You're not much comfort, are you!"

He grinned. "I'll set my watch ahead if you like," he offered, his tone almost gay. The waiting had been hard; but it seemed to him now that the waiting was almost over, and this realization was like a stimulant. His wits were racing; he was becoming steady and cool.

Molly said almost wistfully: "I wish something would happen!" And Nell touched Newbert's arm.

"Tell her what you told me," she urged. "His name's Vinik," she explained to Molly quickly. "And he used to be in love with Madame Capello, and he stole the emerald for her, and they put him in prison, and tortured him for years. Tell her, Jim!"

Jim laughed. "You've already told her," he reminded Nell.

"And he killed her because she didn't love him any more," Nell concluded.

Molly looked at Newbert, then her eyes turned to the gloom outside again. "She said she always thought the emerald was like a jealous eye," she recalled. "She told us that. And—she was afraid of it. I could see she was." She added a moment later: "She must have known he would find her some day." And again, thinking aloud: "That must be why she never went back to Italy. Because she was afraid he'd be there."

"Probably afraid they'd find the emerald in her baggage," Newbert suggested. "They'd search, if they thought it was there."

"He never told anyone she had it," Nell reminded them. "They couldn't make him tell." Her imagination filled the gaps in the story. "I expect when he got out he came back to her, and he was old and ugly, and she wouldn't have him."

Newbert was only half attentive; he was busy with devices, wondering what to do. But the two between them proceeded to complete the tale. "And he'd want her, or he'd want it back again," Molly reminded them. "She'd have to give him —one or the other."

"And she didn't have it to give him," Nell added. "She's sold it to you." She hesitated. "Jim says he's insane," she declared.

Molly looked at Jim. "Why? How do you know?"

He shook his head. "The way he left things," he confessed. He could not detail to them those mute evidences of the madman's bloody madness which the dead woman's body had borne. "It looked so to me." He tried to laugh. "We'll have to humor him," he suggested.

"You think he's—here?" Molly asked. "On the island?"

"There was a dog with him," Newbert reminded her. "A dog like that one we saw." He moved uneasily. "I don't see what he's waiting for. He probably had to wait till the wind died. . . ."

"Did he have a boat?" Nell asked, and the reporter nodded.

"At least I saw a motorboat leaving Little Dog," he pointed out. "But I haven't heard a boat tonight."

"He'd come from across the lake," Nell suggested. "It's rough there when the wind blows, out in the open water. But if he came from that side, you might not hear him. He'd be over behind the island. He'd probably land at the end of the channel, or somewhere over there."

Molly remembered the smaller islands beyond the channel. "He might think they were this island," she suggested. "Might land there. If he

didn't know, it would take him a while to find his way."

"There are ledges everywhere there," Nell remarked. "I'll bet his boat went ashore. "I'll bet he had to swim."

"If it did," Newbert exclaimed, "he won't be able to get away." And he added quickly: "You know, we've got to think of that. Lord knows I hope he doesn't show up; but if he does, we've got to try to nail him. Hold on to him."

"If that's his dog, we can't do anything," Nell urged. "A beast like that can whip half a dozen men."

Newbert shook his head, his voice alert and eager. "I'm not afraid of the dog," he declared. "Unless I have to tackle the man. I can make friends with any dog I ever saw. If you're not afraid of them. You mustn't be afraid of it, if it comes around."

"But you'll have to—fight him," Nell argued. "And then the dog will grab you."

"I think we can talk to him," Newbert urged. He was beginning to form a plan. "He wants the emerald, and if we don't give it to him, he'll stay till he gets it. It's hidden, isn't it?" he asked Molly.

"Yes, yes," she agreed.

"Don't tell him where it is," he advised. "Not till you have to. . . ."

"If it were mine," Nell exclaimed, "I'd give it to him. I'm—sorry for him, a little. To be treated so."

Newbert laughed in a deprecatory fashion. "After all," he suggested, "he's a murderer!"

"What difference does that make?" she demanded. "I can be sorry for him, can't I?"

Molly drew back from the window and went to find a dressing gown, and joined them again. "After all," she pointed out, "there's nothing for us to be afraid of. He just wants the emerald, and we can give it to him if we want to, any time. If we have to."

"That's right," Newbert agreed. "There's no need to be afraid."

"That sounds all right," Nell drawled. "But I'll bet you're both as scared as me."

"I wonder why he doesn't come," Molly murmured. She added, half to herself: "I almost wish he would."

"You don't expect him to walk up the path and knock at the door, do you," Nell reminded them; and Newbert drew back with a discomfited laugh.

"That's right, of course," he exclaimed. "I'm a darned fool, standing here. Hypnotized, or

something." He turned back toward the door. "I'm going to get my trusty axe, anyway," he told Nell, with a chuckle. "And the niblick for you." He came to the door, saw that it was closed, and hesitated for a moment. "That's funny," he said, and stopped where he was.

"What?" Molly asked uncertainly.

"I don't remember shutting the door when we came in," he explained. "Did I?"

Nell slipped to his side, caught his arm. "I came in behind you, and I certainly didn't shut it," she whispered. "What do you suppose. . . ."

Molly laughed at them both. "One way to find out who wrote a letter is to open it," she reminded them; and Newbert laid his hand on the knob and turned it. The door was hung to open outward on the balcony; but it did not yield to his pressure, and he tried again. It moved half an inch or so, stopped solidly.

"Blocked," he whispered. "Something propped against it outside," and abruptly he rattled the handle with a tumultuous violence. Nell at his elbow caught his hand, cried:

"Don't! Don't make so much noise!"

"Thought I might free it," he explained, and he looked around warily. "Don't like it, being shut in here."

"We can go out through the bathroom," Molly reminded him.

"Why don't we just stay here?" Nell urged. "I don't want to go out. There's nothing I want out there."

Molly looked at Newbert; and he hesitated, considering, then shook his head. "I want to know what's going on," he protested. "You two stay here. I'll go out the other way, and look around." He added: "You can bolt the bathroom door, can't you? After I get out."

"We'll come with you," Molly suggested, but Nell objected to this, and in the end Jim went alone. The bathroom lay between two bedrooms; and the bolts upon its doors were so arranged that they could be secured inside and out; so Molly went into the bathroom with him, and when he had passed through she bolted the door behind him, and returned into the bedroom and bolted that door as well. And she and Nell stayed close together, clinging to one another, listening for any sound that would tell them what Jim's movements were.

For a time they heard nothing at all. He went cautiously, convinced that the madman was already in the house, listening for the patter of the feet of the great dog, expecting its attack at any moment. From the bedroom he progressed to the

door that led into the hall; and he took extreme care in issuing from this door, assuring himself, before he ventured to show his head, that there was no one in wait outside. His progress had been soundless; he thought it possible he had not yet alarmed the other man; and the open door of another bedroom immediately across the hall from that in which he stood suggested his next movement. He stooped and removed his shoes, and so silently crossed the hall and passed through that chamber and the bath into the big south bedroom opposite that in which were Molly and Nell. Whoever had barred their door would, he thought, be watching it to make sure they did not break their way to freedom; he could from this vantage take the watcher in the rear.

But—and he found this definitely disquieting—he could not hear any sound or discover any evidence that there was another man in the house. He listened, he waited, and he spied in every direction that was open to his eyes; and he thought at last that the door across the hall might have stuck of itself. The great chimney rose between it and where he stood so that he could not see; and at length he ventured out upon the balcony and moved cautiously around toward it. Thus he saw that it had been fastened shut with a billet of wood propped beneath the knob; a piece

of firewood from the basket by the hearth below. The man then had come upstairs. . . . Might still be here. . . . Must be watching from some hiding place.

Molly and Nell, standing at the moment just inside that closed door, heard the soft impact of his stockinged feet approaching; and the light footfalls seemed to them like the sounds a dog's pads might make. Then they heard the log lifted away from beneath the knob; and they were clinging together in the middle of the room, watching the doorway with wide eyes filled with terror, when he opened it and looked in at them. Nell's relief at sight of him was so great that she gave a gasping cry; and even Molly caught her breath. He saw their dismay and exclaimed:

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

"You sounded like a dog," Nell told him. "Where are your shoes?"

"I wanted to move quietly," he explained. He had the stick of wood in his hands, and he lifted it to show them. "The door was propped shut with this," he said. Then frowned in bewilderment. "But there's no one in the house that I can find. I haven't been everywhere, of course. It's got me. I don't see. . . ." They watched him, silent and intent. "I suppose he blocked us in while he took a look around."

"Looking for the emerald!" Nell cried.

He shook his head. "No, he'd know it'd be here in Mrs. Main's room."

"It isn't," said Molly unguardedly; and Newbert warned her in a quick tone:

"Don't say anything about it. He must be near."

She nodded understanding; and Nell suggested eagerly: "Maybe he's found it, then, and got it, and gone."

Newbert hesitated, and then he laughed a little. "I'm stumped," he confessed. "I don't know what to do." He turned back to the balcony and looked toward the spot where he had left the axe. It was gone, and the niblick too; and the discovery left him so ludicrously defenseless that he laughed again. Nell impatiently demanded:

"What's so funny, Jim?"

"He's taken my axe," he explained. "And your niblick. Lucky I had the pool balls in my pocket."

"You've got the pistol," Molly reminded him.

"It's no good," Nell explained. "It's broken."

This, that had seemed like a catastrophe when Newbert first discovered it, shrank now to inconsiderable proportions. Molly received it with the faintest nod. "I see."

"He's just fooling with us," Jim commented,

with a little gesture of helplessness. "We don't know where he is, or what he's doing. But he knows all about us. Probably listening to us now. Spotting us. I suppose it's the emerald," he continued. "He doesn't know where it is, and he's waiting for us to show him. Chances are he thinks if we're scared badly enough we'll put our hands on it."

Molly shook her head, smiling faintly. "I don't think he can ever find it in the world," she declared.

He looked at them. "Let's go downstairs," he suggested abruptly. "I'm—tired of skulking around, hiding and trembling and shivering and waiting for him to get ready to do something. Let's go downstairs and sit there and talk, or go out in the kitchen and get a bite to eat. It can't be any worse than this."

Molly met his eyes fairly. "All right," she said with a nod. She laughed in a curiously gay little fashion, her taut nerves sharpening a little at the tone of this laughter. "All right, I'll go down. Will you, Nell? I'm not going to sneak around my own house any more for any crazy man." She drew her dressing-gown more closely about her, knotted the cord at the waist. "Let's go out in the kitchen and get something to eat, and a cup of coffee."

She started for the door, and Nell hesitated for a moment and then came after her. "I think you're both crazy," she said. "If it was me, I'd go out and climb a tree and stay up there till morning. But I might as well get killed with the rest of you."

Newbert led the way toward the stair. "And let's quit imagining we hear things, and see things," he suggested, grinning over his shoulder at them. "Keep your eyes front, and your ears shut. Let him make the first move, if he's going to. What do you say?"

"Let's," Molly agreed. And as they started down the stair she came at his side, and Nell was on the other side, and they slipped their hands through his arm. The stair was not wide enough to prevent their being cramped together; they laughed at their own difficulties, their voices faintly hysterical. This adventure, this passage through the big house with potential danger on every hand, intoxicated them; the very recklessness of the procedure filled them with a great exhilaration. Nell's cheeks were burning and there was a little moisture on her brow. When she was pressed against the rail on one side of the stair she cried:

"Stop your pushing, Molly!" And she thrust Newbert away from her, against Molly, and

Molly caromed into the wall, and they laughed, too loudly.

At the foot of the stair they halted a moment, each one faintly faltering; but Newbert said quickly: "Come on now, the three musketeers."

"'All for one and one for all'," Molly echoed; and they linked arms again, and swung to the left toward the wide arch that led into the billiard room, thus arm in arm. Newbert was between them, one holding either arm; and Nell was on the side away from the stair, nearer the chimney. Thus she was the first to come into a position to see into the archway; the first to see the dog.

The great creature came to meet them there, came at a slow and stiff-toed walk; he was within three paces of them before Nell saw him; he was within a leap of their throats before they could check themselves. And when they stopped, stiff and still, he also stopped and poised; and his lips drew back again in that soundless little snarl.

XI

THUS arm in arm, Molly and Jim and Nell came face to face with the great dog in the archway there; and the two women recoiled a little, their feet scuffling on the floor in a fluttering fashion. But Jim stood firm, and his firmness steadied them; and the house was very still. Only they could hear a faint whispering sound as the dog tried his pads upon the polished boards of the floor, making sure of his grip upon them, standing firm-footed, muscles tensed for a spring. And they saw his hind-quarters droop a little as though he were crouching; and his tail was low and stiff and his ears turned backward. His mouth opened and shut, the lips curling back, then closing again, then curling away from his great teeth once more; but he made no sound. There was no sound at all save the faint whisper of his rough pads upon the floor; but Molly's heart beat with such a heavy impact that her body shook and shuddered; and Nell's strength drained away from her; and only Jim managed a steady countenance, firm stand, and a friendly smile.

He spoke to the dog. He said, in a fashion most matter of fact: "Hello, Pup! How'd you get in here?"

The dog's lip curled; and his white fangs gleamed a little. Where the beast stood he was to some degree in the shadow; he was just within the archway, and this arch may have been six or eight feet deep, with a closet set under the stairs on either side. There was no light in the arch itself; the lighted billiard room behind the dog caught him in silhouette; the lights in the living-room failed to strike him fairly. Nevertheless they could see the faint flickering embers of his eyes; and they could see his white fangs bare. When Newbert thus spoke to him, he mouthed again that silent snarl; and Newbert spoke once more.

"What's the matter with the old fellow?" he asked comfortingly. "What's on your mind, Pup. How's the boy!"

The dog's ears came forward, cocking a little, giving him for the moment an air of almost ludicrous curiosity; and Nell at Jim's side giggled in a fashion full of faint hysteria. Jim touched her hand, quieting her.

"Ataboy," he said, still in that friendly and assuring tone. "He's a nice pup!"

And he extended his hand, gently, tentatively,

with no suggestion of aggression in the movement. Yet the dog drew back a half-pace, and crouched lower, and this time his snarl was vocal. Then Newbert laughed in an amused fashion:

"Come on," he drawled. "It's all right, old man. Nice pup!"

The dog seemed uncertain and doubtful; and, after a moment, cautiously, watching them sidewise, it turned its head; turned to the left, toward the player piano in the niche beside the archway there. And then for the first time they had assurance that the animal was not alone; for a man, out of sight there, hidden from them, spoke in a soft and sibilant fashion. Spoke to the dog; said warningly:

"S-st, Marco!"

Instantly the dog stiffened once more, muzzle levelled at them, eyes flickering to one and then another, ears back; a presentment full of menace, warning them to be still.

Molly and Nell, while Newbert thus sought to cajole the beast who held them there, had regained to some small degree their composure; had recovered from the shock of that confrontation. And listening to Newbert, watching the dog, they had forgot to wonder where the animal's master was. Forgot that about him must still centre their graver fears. When he spoke to the

beast, to this dog Marco, now, they remembered. And while the dog assumed once more his vigil over them, their eyes ached toward the direction from which that voice had come.

As they stood—and they dared not move—Nell could not see the player piano at all; Newbert could see half of its end, an angle of its top; only Molly, on the left, could see any considerable part of the instrument. But she could not see the man who had spoken. He was keeping back, withdrawn, out of sight; and for a long moment after he spoke to the dog, none of them uttered a word. The three waited for a move from him; he waited for they knew not what. And the dog, visible no doubt to its master, confronted the three and by the menace of its posture held them from flight or from advance.

There had been in that whispered admonition to the dog a quality which Molly and Nell found frightful; a quality impossible to define. The whispering voice was low and controlled and steady; yet there was something in its susurrant timbre strangely ragged, as though it were uttered between a man's racking sobs; as though the vocal cords which formed the adjuration were vibrating like taut wires. Newbert, less sensitive, felt this in lesser degree; he was alert to the present problem, to his business of placating the

dog, implanting in its canine mind a doubt as to his own place in the scheme of things, preparing a friendship there. He ignored the man, smiled at the beast; and he persisted in his friendly and assuring tone.

"All right, old boy," he said gently. "All right, pup. Good boy, Marco!" And he saw the backward flattened ears twitch as the dog heard its name; and abruptly he addressed the hidden man, courteously and in most friendly tones. "Good evening, sir," he said, looking toward the piano.

The man there offered no reply to this greeting; and after a moment Newbert continued: "Are you in trouble? Did your boat get caught in the squall, perhaps? Can we do anything for you? Offer you transport? Or a lodging for the night?" He added, as one comforts a stricken child: "A fine dog of yours, this Marco. Good dog! I'm a friend of dogs like Marco." And whenever he spoke the dog's name it was with an emphasis of kindliness; so that before he was done, the dog's ears were pricked forward again.

The man spoke then, spoke to them; his voice was low and hurried and uncertain. "Are you Mr. Paul Main?" he asked. "Are you Mr. Main?"

Newbert replied straightforwardly: "No; no,

my name is Newbert. Mrs. Main is with me if you wish to speak to her. And this young lady is Miss Harmon." He laughed a little in a friendly way. "Introductions so are not quite satisfactory. Won't you emerge? Or we will advance?"

There was a momentary pause, and then the man said in a tone of tremulous warning: "If you attack me, Marco will destroy you."

Newbert laughed again. "Marco's a good dog," he agreed. "You needn't worry about us; we're friendly folk. You must be in distress, to come at this hour, and in this fashion. And we'll do what we may for you." He smiled at the dog, and took a casual forward step. Nell held back, but he compelled her with his eye. "We're coming in," he said. "So that you can have a look at us." And to the dog he spoke in friendly command. "All right, Marco. Back, boy!"

At their movement, the dog had stiffened again; but since their advance was neither menacing nor frightened, he was in doubt, and he drew away before them and to one side, as though to keep between them and his master, to protect this master of his. But Newbert did not turn that way; with Molly on one arm and Nell on the other he stepped forward into the middle of the billiard room and swung to face the player piano.

There was light enough here; there was a bulb above their heads; the lamps over the pool table were turned on; there was another lamp on a reading table at one side, covered with a yellow shade. Themselves were in full light, but where the piano stood was shadow. The man himself, they now saw, was half concealed behind its end; only a part of his head, his tumbled hair and his eyes watching them, were visible. His eyes were curiously wide, distended. And the dog stood now just before him, between the three and this man his master, waiting for command, uncertain what to do. And he growled a little, warningly.

"This is Mrs. Main," said Newbert gravely, indicating Molly. "And this Miss Harmon. We do not know you, sir."

The man scrutinized them with a fixed and steady glance; and they saw his head move to and fro when he turned his eyes from one to another, as though these distended eyes of his were fixed in his head and could not be shifted in their sockets. His head moved stiffly; there was something sick and unhealthy in this stiffness; the movement was as uncertain as that of a paralytic.

"You do not know me," he agreed at last, in that voice so taut, so ready to break. "You do not know me."

He was still; and Newbert watched the dog, and smiled, and said under his breath: "Marco, old boy!"

"I have had an accident," said the man finally, as though he had chosen his words with long care. "I have had a mishap. I am a castaway upon this island, this island here. I had a boat; but it struck upon a rock and there is a hole in it, and a spur of the rock protrudes through this hole." He hesitated, the continued: "I am a very nervous man. I feared you would take me for a marauder."

Newbert laughed. "They don't have burglars up here," he said reassuringly.

"I thought it possible you would let me telephone for a boat to fetch me off," said the man, turning his head in that stiff little way, keeping himself well hidden.

"Sorry," Newbert explained. "The telephone is out of order; it has been disconnected. Glad to put you up for the night though. That is, Mrs. Main will be glad to." He looked at Molly; and she said gravely:

"Certainly."

"You cannot telephone?" the man repeated. "Has it been so for long?"

"All day," Molly told him; and Newbert, understanding before the others, said quickly.

"Yes, we've been cut off from the world all

day. Just the three of us on the island here. Haven't seen anybody."

Molly was grown bolder; heartened by a consideration which had not occurred to the others at all. This man had expected to find Paul here; had taken Newbert for Paul. Therefore Paul's absence, whatever the cause, had no connection with the madman's presence; and this conviction reassured her tremendously, banished what stifled fears for Paul's sake she had held heretofore. So she now took a hand, following Newbert's lead.

"We expected Mr. Main tonight," she explained. "I think he came on the late train. He's probably had trouble finding a boat to bring him up, on account of the storm." She added in a conversational tone: "That's why we're up so late." And she smiled. "You wouldn't usually find us awake at this time of night; but we're expecting Paul almost any minute now."

The man for a moment thereafter made no move or sound; and then, like an apparition, he appeared in full view before them. That is, he emerged from behind the piano; but he was still in the shadows. They could see only that he was hatless, coatless; that his trousers were dark, his shirt a lighter hue, his tie bedraggled. He asked a question, uncertainly, his head turned this

way and that. "He comes up the lake or down?"

"Up the lake," Molly explained. "We watched for him for a while, from the mole. In front of the house, you know."

The man slipped across in front of them, disregarding them; he darted like a shadow through the arch into the living-room. Newbert said softly: "He's gone to look!" The dog snarled at their movement; and Newbert spoke to it. "Let's take care of him, Marco," he said gently. "Come along, old man!" And with the two still hanging on his arms, he followed the other man. The dog bounded to keep ahead of them, backed through the arch before them.

There were two doors leading out upon the front veranda, and the man, this Vinik, had gone to the north door; but that one was locked, was never opened. When they appeared, he was wrenching at the knob; and Molly called to him:

"The other door. That one's fast!"

Vinik flung a glance at them, hissed faintly to the dog; and Marco held them where they were beside the great chimney. But as Vinik crossed to the other door, the dog turned uncertainly, and looked toward him; and then with a bound the beast went ahead of him, came first to the door, barked in a sharp and curious fashion.

Vinik paused, looked at Marco and back at them again.

"Who's there?" he asked, in a whisper.

Newbert shook his head. "No one," he declared, honestly. "There's no one on the island but us. Unless someone came with you."

Marco was standing just within the closed door, staring at its panels fixedly, as though to penetrate the solid wood with his glance. He barked again; but there was not the same challenge in his bark now; and Vinik noted the difference and seemed relieved.

"Ah, fie!" he said faintly. "You deceive me, Marco." He crossed to the door and opened it. "See!" he directed.

Marco would have gone out; but Vinik checked his move. "No," he bade. "No. Back. S-st, Marco." And he lifted his hand toward the three, so that the dog wheeled uncertainly to face them, to hold them with his eye. And Vinik went alone out upon the mole.

Nell clutched Newbert's arm, whispered: "There's blood on his sleeve!"

"S-sh!" he warned her. "Don't be frightened!"

"He's been in the water," Molly reminded them. "It's mud!"

The dog was uneasy, and his head turned uncertainly toward the door through which Vinik

had disappeared. Newbert spoke to the beast. "He's all right, Marco," he said. "All right, old boy!"

Vinik appeared in the doorway then, returning; he came in and they saw him clearly for the first time, in full light. He was a little man, and he moved stiffly and spasmodically, as though each movement were the sharp reaction to a tormenting inward twinge; he jerked to and fro like a man prodded with needles. His eyes were wide, a circle of inflamed white around each pupil; and his lips were white against his swarthy skin; and upon the right sleeve of his shirt there was a dark stain, its edges watery and blurred. All his garments were wet; but they were no longer dripping. They clung to him damply; and he shivered. Or he trembled; they could not be sure. But Molly said gently:

"You're cold! Come; we'll build up a fire."

He held himself aloof from them, watching Newbert, alert against any possible attack; and the dog now was at his feet, down at "charge," hind legs gathered under it ready for a spring. Newbert put a log upon the fire, on the dying embers; and the log broke into flame. He looked at Nell and he saw that she was pale and shuddering; and he made her sit down in a chair where her face was shadowed. Molly, at this,

also sat down; and after a moment Newbert imitated them, so that only Vinik himself was left standing.

He seemed reassured at this; and surprisingly, he smiled; smiled in the polite fashion of a cultivated man. "You must have understood," he said, addressing Molly, "you must have understood that it was not chance which directed me to this island; that I knew to whom it belonged. I did not intend to intrude upon you at this hour. . . ." She made no reply, unable to dissemble.

"It is thus," he said, with a gesture of his hands, spreading them before him, as though he would elucidate. "It is thus," he explained, "I am an old friend of Madame Capello."

His eyes were for an instant glassy. "A very old friend," he repeated; and the dog growled rumblingly.

"She has confided in me," he continued, and Marco seemed reassured. "She showed me once a jewel which she had; and I sought to purchase it from her. She said then that she would never sell it; but I came this evening to see her, to persuade her if I could. And she had sold it to Mr. Main."

His eyes were on Molly; and she nodded, her color fading faintly. "Yes," she agreed.

He fumbled in his pocket. "She had still his

check," he told her, almost eagerly now, his words coming more swiftly. "See." He produced it. "It has been wetted," he confessed. "But I have it here. I have bought it from her, you understand. And I wish to buy this jewel from Mr. Main. I will give him back his check, and another for the same amount. That will satisfy him, no doubt?" His tone was appealing, eager, full of a curious hunger.

"You mean the—emerald," Molly said gently. She found herself curiously unable to be afraid of this man, this madman, this maniac with a woman's life staining there his sleeve. He was so wistful a figure, so eager, so appealing; and there were upon him such marks of the torment he endured.

His lips twisted, as though with a paroxysm. "The jewel Mr. Main bought from her," he conceded.

Newbert relieved her of replying. "Mr. Main ought to be here in the morning," he suggested. "I expect he'll be glad to make a profit on the stone."

Vinik shook his head, sharply, so that it waved like a hammer striking upon stone. "But I am in haste," he cried. "In great haste. I wish to conclude this and be away, at once, away."

Molly said, with a little smile: "My husband

loves a bargain. You had better not let him see how eager you are to have the stone. Are you a dealer? Do you want to sell it again?"

He hesitated, biting at his lips; and then he spoke swiftly, the words rushing as water rushes over the lip of a tilted pail. "I was a dealer, a jewelsmith," he said, his voice low and trembling. "This stone; it was in my hands. And then it vanished, and the blame fell upon me, and my honor was gone, and my liberty." His hands at his sides twitched and jerked; his eyes looked beyond them. "Years," he exclaimed. "Year upon year! And torment upon torment! Racked and wrecked! My honor and my life gone—so!"

The last word was sharp; he was still; his voice like a cry ceased as abruptly as the water ceases to flow when the pail is set upright again. Yet his lips trembled with unuttered words; and he shuddered where he stood; and the great dog, Marco, at his feet, looked up into the little man's face and whined; and then, with a curious contortion, the beast twisted himself around and half rose and licked his master's hand. They could hear his tongue rasp in the silence.

Molly said pityingly: "And you wish to recover it, to set yourself right again?"

"Right?" he cried. His voice rose, strained and harsh. And he laughed, and that was terrible.

Then once more the flood of words broke from his lips, pouring and rushing.

"I am penned in it!" he cried. "Shut up in it!" Prisoned in it! Many years of my life! Ten, twelve, fifteen. I lost the account of them. And many hours of pain, till I lay sobbing and they forebore so that I might live for pain again. And all my youth; and all those things, those great deeds I hoped to do; and love and hope; and dreams. Set that right?"

He laughed again; he moved toward them, the dog stirring now at his side, standing there, nuzzling at his hand. And the man's face was contorted, his lips twitched, and they became wet and dripping.

"I want to destroy it," he cried, in a voice like a scream. "Beat it with hammers, and grind it, and burn it, and blast it, and stamp upon its dust! Till no man can say it ever was."

He checked himself abruptly, and he looked at them one after the other with suspicious eyes, with intent and searching eyes, examining their souls, seeking to find therein any spark that would fulminate the forces pent within him. Any least derision, any suspicion, any accusation. And they sat as still as stones: Nell in her shadowed chair; and Molly beneath the lamp, her eyes benign and pitying; and Newbert on the wicker

seat, hiding his readiness and his resolution behind a friendly little smile.

About them the great house was still; above, the grotesque chimney towered, the distorted boulders grinning down upon them; and in the silence Newbert heard the bat squeak overhead. He could hear many little sounds; it was easy to imagine that he heard others. Something like a movement on the veranda outside. . . . A leaf blown there, perhaps. And the thumping a canoe makes when the water tosses it lightly against the wharf alongside which it lies. Vinik was looking at him, piercing the depths of his eyes; and Newbert cleared them of every shadow. But he listened just the same; wondered if it were possible that Paul was come, that there was someone watching through the window. Marco would know; Marco, the dog. When Vinik drew back, Newbert looked at Marco. But the dog's attention was all upon its master now; and the beast was troubled, whining faintly; and Newbert saw that its tail drooped and tucked forward.

"It knows he is sick," he thought. "It knows his madness."

He spoke, softly: "All right, Marco!" And the dog looked at him with steady intentness, and then turned back to Vinik again.

Vinik seemed satisfied that there was no

offense in them; he drew back, and wiped his hand across his brow. "You will think me mad," he said, smiling wearily. His eyes darted from one to the other. "This that I say may wear that sound to you. But I tell you this small jewel robbed me of everything. If I can find it, and obliterate it, I will be a man again."

He struggled inwardly. "It came to Madame Capello," he explained. "And one day she showed it to me. A little, unset green stone. Like a drop of poison. I begged her to sell it back to me," he cried and his voice rose bitterly. "Begged her! She thought me insane," he ended in a whisper.

They had lost all sense of the strangeness of this hour. Nell still trembled, still shuddered with fear; that brown stain upon his arm was burning before her eyes; she could not forget it; fought to keep her eyes away from it, yet found them forever stealing back again to the horror there. Yet there were moments when she felt too that vague pity and sorrow which moved Molly so deeply. The older woman yearned to the pitiful little man, even while she shrank from the fires which burned in him. She had momentarily the impulse to give him the emerald; considered this; hesitated from fear that the frenzy which possession of it must inspire in him would precipi-

tate a madness that would destroy them all. Only Newbert remained alert and dispassionate. He was sorry for the man; but also he perceived in him potentialities of deadly peril. He was not sentimental; the life of a newspaper man does not conduce to sentimentality. A reporter has few illusions. Newbert could be sorry for Vinik, and stern too. The man was a pitiful figure; but an enemy of society all the same. And as far as this immediate situation was concerned, he was a destructive and dangerous man whose madness might at any moment be let loose. When that moment came, it would be for him, Newbert, to act. He had little doubt of his ability to handle Vinik; the madman was, so far as he could see, without any weapon. Only the dog, the great dog, this Marco, was his ally; and Newbert, perceiving this, spent his every effort to plant doubt in Marco's heart, to win some hold there for himself; so that if the test came Marco might perhaps be uncertain what to do. He might have advised Molly to give up the emerald; but this seemed to Newbert outside his province, wholly her affair. If she wished to cling to it, he must do his utmost to protect her in that attitude. He might consider surrender wise; but he could not say so when that surrender would be at her cost instead of at his own.

"I loved her," Vinik said suddenly, in the hush that had fallen. "When she was young we loved. She and I." His voice was low. "But they had ravaged me and twisted me and racked me; I had no youth to make her love me now."

He turned a pace aside, came back with swift impatience. "Give it to me," he said suddenly, his eyes burning. "Give it to me here, now. In my hands." His lips twisted. "Give the thing to me."

He was leaning toward Molly; and Newbert, to draw him away, said: "Mr. Main ought to be here soon."

But at the same moment, Nell, driven frantic by her fears, cried. "It isn't here! It's gone!"

He had swung to Newbert; he jerked round to Nell now. "Gone?" he challenged furiously.

"Mr. Main took it to Boston," Nell insisted. "He did! He did!"

His arms curled up; and Newbert got swiftly to his feet behind the little man, ready. Vinik's arms curled up, the fingers bending like hooks. "She said that!" he said hoarsely, in a voice like a snarl. "She said that! When I would have it from her."

He laughed in a terrifying fashion, with a sound like a shriek at the end. "And she was frightened too!" he screamed, in Nell's very

teeth. "Frightened, too! You're frightened now. You look like her! You look like her!" Yet he made no move to touch her; and Newbert held his hand; and the great dog whined at Vinik's heel.

"She was frightened, and she ran!" Vinik said, his voice sinking, shuddering. "She ran." He flung his arms high, triumphantly, madness full upon him now.

"She ran away, along the hall; but we came upon her, Marco and I!"

Nell's stiff lips opened; and she huddled back in her chair and her dry throat split in a strangling scream. In the moment's silence after, Vinik spoke again.

"Stopped her screaming, there!" he said, in a dull, low tone; and Marco, at his heel, sick with the sickness that rode his master in this moment, turned back his head and uttered a low, moaning sound like a distant, smothered mournful howl. Nell screamed again, cowering from him; and Vinik, rigidly, bent toward her. His hands reached out for her; and Newbert moved to grip his arm.

As he moved he spoke to the dog. "Steady, Marco," he said. "He's all right, old boy." Then to the man, soothingly: "Now Vinik!"

The storm in a moment more must have been

loosed but for Molly's word. She said quickly, yet in a steady tone: "Still, Nell!" And to the madman. "The emerald is here!"

He whirled toward her, stared into her eyes, stood rigidly there; and what he saw in her glance seemed to quiet him. "You're not afraid!" he mumbled gratefully.

She shook her head. "No," she agreed. "And —you may have it if you will. I'll fetch it for you now. . . ."

She would have risen. "No. I. Where?" He was shaking like a great tree before it falls.

"In the fountain," she said. "It's in the fountain."

Nell coiled away from him, pushing her chair away; she slipped out of it, along the flank of the chimney, Newbert sighed a little, felt a great lift of relief. And Marco the dog was at his side; and Newbert touched the beast's neck, and felt the hackles rise. Yet Marco submitted to the touch; and Newbert's fingers stirred behind the great beast's ears, and he whispered:

"Good boy!"

"Fountain?" Vinik challenged.

"It's outside," Molly explained steadily. "Out on the mole. A boy with a spitting goose; and a basin around. There's water in the basin."

"Where is it?" he challenged. "Quickly, where?"

"I'll have to show you," she suggested. "We'll get lights, a flash light, go and find it now." And again she moved to rise; but he was writhing with impatience.

"Where is it?" he insisted. "I want no lights. Be quick. Tell me. . . ."

"I dropped it in the basin," she explained. "On this side toward the house. You'll feel it on the bottom there."

He left her then, wrenching away, bounding away; he crossed to the door at a single leap, and Marco, startled and attentive, watched him go. The dog seemed uncertain what to do, looked at the three, then after his master again. But Vinik reached the door and wrenched it wide and was through; and by accident or by design he whipped it close behind him, so that it banged explosively.

Molly had come to her feet; Nell darted to Newbert's side. The dog, at the door by this time, sniffed at its crack, scratched at the sill, barked uneasily.

And then outside they heard a cry, and a rush of feet; and upon this a hoarse and maddened shout. Almost instantly thereafter, and before they could move, a shot rang in the night; and

the shot was drowned in a great confusion of sounds and cries. Nell screamed again, clutching at Newbert's arm.

Then Newbert, watching, saw Marco wheel and rise from the floor in a great bound, fair at one of the windows toward the mole; the dog struck the glass and burst through, carrying the frame before him, bent in blind and desperate devotion to his master's aid.

XII

THIS abrupt turn of events struck the three persons left in the living-room with such an impact of surprise and bewilderment that for a moment they were helpless, unable to move, unable to understand. When the dog flung himself through the window, Nell felt her knees sag under her, and she would have fallen but for Molly's quick arm around her waist. Newbert was the first to recover himself; he moved uncertainly to the door—the night outside was hideous with sounds of strangling struggle—and Nell, from Molly's arms, called to him swiftly:

"No, no, Jim! Don't go out there!"

He looked back and saw her terror; and he came to her side, touched her arm. "It's all right, Nell," he said reassuringly. "It's all right now."

She tried to manage a smile. "I know," she agreed. "I'm a fool. But—don't go out there now, Jim. Please!"

He turned his head uncertainly, listening; and they also listened. The confusion of conflict was silent now; they could hear nothing save the barking of the dog, muffled, remote, frantic.

"He's in the lake," Molly said softly. "He's jumped off the mole."

"There was someone out there," Jim reminded them. "Someone shot. Vinik didn't have a gun."

"Don't go out," Nell begged. "Let's not bother them. If they don't bother us. Stay here, Jim."

Jim shook his head, smiling at her. "I—think it's finished, now," he suggested. "Hear the dog! He can't find his master; that's a bark of distress."

"I've got a flashlight here in the desk," Molly remembered, and fetched it; and Jim touched Nell's arm.

"Come along," he urged. "There's nothing to hurt you, Nell."

"I think we're fools to go out there," she protested. But she had no thought of being left behind; so presently they went together, Molly sweeping the way before them with the flashlight's beam. It rested upon the fountain, the boy with his spitting goose; and it covered all the surface of the mole, revealing nothing. She even turned the ray up into the hemlock tree beside the steps, among the empty branches there. Then they went forward, down to the sandy level of the mole and to its outer end, and stood there by the balustrade, searching the surface of the water with the flashlight's beam.

Marco the dog was there, swimming this way and that, barking incessantly in a frenzied and pitiful fashion; behind his head a wide ripple spread as he quested to and fro; and the water surged before his great chest. Now and then he lifted himself half out of water, as though to look about; and their eyes followed him, fascinated by the fury of his efforts. It was Marco who first saw the canoe, a little way off, floating half awash; and the dog swam to it, and tried to climb into it, and discovered its emptiness and abandoned it again. And Jim said quickly:

"I'll go get a boat! Get out there."

"There's nothing to do," Molly reminded him. "There's no one in the water anywhere."

"I can pick up that canoe, before it drifts off," he suggested; and he ran back through the veranda and along the path toward the boat-houses. Nell made a movement as though to follow him; but Molly checked her.

"No, stay with me," she said. And Nell submitted, stayed. They watched the dog, tirelessly casting this way and that; and presently Newbert came in his skiff, passing just beneath them.

Molly called: "There's something in the water out there, Mr. Newbert. The dog picked it up in his mouth a minute ago, and dropped it again. Something light-colored."

"Where?" he asked. "I'll get it."

"I'll keep the light on it," she told him.

So he followed the beam till he came to the thing; and Marco saw the boat and raced to its side. Newbert spoke to the dog. "It's all right, old man, he's gone," he said. "I'll lift you in here." And he sought to catch Marco by the scruff of the neck, but the beast swung away to continue his search again.

Then Jim came to the thing Molly had seen, and picked it out of the water; a cap, floating water-soaked and half submerged. Molly called: "What is it?"

"A man's cap," said Jim, thoughtfully. Vinik's head had been bare. The reporter dropped the cap in the bottom of the skiff, and backed toward the canoe, floating now some distance below the mole; and he came to it and caught the painter and secured it to the ring in the stern of the skiff, and started to row back toward the mole again. At about the same time, down the lake, he heard the exhaust of a motorboat, and looked that way and saw its red and green lights; knew it was headed for the island. By the time he reached the base of the mole, it was much nearer; and he called softly to Molly:

"You've seen the boat, Mrs. Main?"

"It's Dill's," she said quickly. "I know the sound. Yes, we've been watching it."

He realized that Marco was no longer barking; and he asked them: "Where's the dog?"

"He came ashore," said Nell. "He went racing up along the shore, through the trees."

Then Molly leaped atop the balustrade above him, and she stood there, waving her arms toward the boat now no more than a hundred yards away. "He can't hear us anyway," she explained, in a matter of fact tone curiously in contrast with the jubilation of her gestures. "There's no use shouting."

"Is it Dill?" Nell asked; and then a hail came across the water.

"All right, Molly? Everything's all right?"

Molly leaped to the ground; she began to run, hurrying to the wharf. "It's Paul," she called back, in ecstasy. "It's Paul!"

Paul had a tale to tell; a tale that under other circumstances might have engrossed them. When his train reached Laconia, one of the men in the express office in the station boarded it and sought him out and gave him a message purporting to come from Molly. "She sent word to tell you one of the children was sick and she was driving down and for you to come right down on the train," the man explained. Paul's train met the

down express at Laconia; there was no time to question or to telephone. So three minutes later he was on his way back to town again. At Concord he tried to telephone, but the call failed to go through in time; and between Manchester and Nashua, maddeningly, the engine broke a connecting rod and they were delayed, expecting every minute to move on, for a matter of two hours or more. In Nashua he tried to telephone again, got the man servant at home and learned that he had been deceived. "So I hired a car," he concluded. "And I heard about Madame Capello's being killed, there in Nashua; and Raleigh had told me enough about the emerald so I'd have worried about you anyway; and this scheme to keep me out of the way made it look worse." He laughed with a great relief. "I tell you, I burned up the road, coming up here, Molly." And his arm tightened around her where she sat there at his side, on the wicker seat before the fire.

Dill grinned in agreement. "I'm going to say he was in a state," he declared. "When he got me out of bed."

"And I had a flat tire below Concord," Paul added. "And then Dill's blasted boat wouldn't start." He hugged Molly close and kissed her. "Nothing ever looked better to me than the sight of you standing on the balustrade out there."

"I knew it was you," she said gently, happily; and Nell made a scornful little gesture.

"You couldn't see a thing," she declared.

Molly only smiled. "But I knew," she said again.

Marco came scratching at the door then; and Newbert let him in and he raced through the house, tongue pendant, panting heavily. Newbert sought to quiet him; but he paid no heed to any of them. Searched the house, and then departed again; and a little while after he must have given up his quest at last; for they heard him howl, and when they looked out he was sitting on the balustrade above the lake, his muzzle pointed to the sky. Molly said gently: "Poor fellow!" And Paul added:

"He's a big brute."

"That's why he scared us so," Molly agreed.

It was in a fashion more or less disconnected that Paul got from them the story of the night. He had already had from Dill the details of the murder. "They located the negro maid at Concord," he told them. "And they found that this madman bought his boat in Lakeport a week ago. The girl saw him come to Little Dog; and he terrified her so that she simply ran away. She's still half insane with fear."

"I know exactly how she feels," Nell declared;

and they all laughed at that, and Nell laughed with them.

The cap, that cap which Newbert picked up in the Lake, served to resolve in their minds the final mystery. When she saw it Molly said:

"I saw a man wearing that cap, at the landing this morning."

Jim looked at her quickly. "I've seen it before, too," he declared. "Chap that had it on came and sat near us in the restaurant, the day Raleigh and Paul and I had lunch together. Remember, Paul?"

"I didn't notice," Paul confessed. "Take your word for it, Jim."

"He heard me say you were coming tonight," Molly explained to her husband. "Heard me at the landing this morning."

"Yesterday morning," Paul reminded her. "It's almost four o'clock now."

Dill offered a word. "He asked me a pile of questions, too, Mis' Main," he explained. "After you'd left. But I never thought anything about it."

"That canoe he had belonged to the Randalls," Paul said. "They've gone home. He probably broke into their boathouse." He added, for Newbert's benefit: "It's just opposite us, on the point over there."

"Molly and I heard a canoe!" Nell exclaimed. "When we came up from the landing right after dark! It was over toward the channel. That must have been he. He'd probably been on the island ever since."

Molly said eagerly, to Newbert: "You saw him; it must have been he you saw, outside the billiard room door."

"I saw him after that," Jim confessed. "At the kitchen skylight. Thought I was imagining things. My head was swimming pretty badly anyway."

"And it must have been he that locked us in Molly's room, after we first saw the dog," Nell suggested.

Paul nodded. "He was probably listening outside, when you told the other man where the emerald was, Molly," he guessed. "I expect he jumped back to the fountain and started to grope in it; and this other chap came out and found him there." He hesitated, imagining what must have happened. "Probably he got down into the canoe, jumped down, and the crazy man jumped down on top of him. And they had it out there."

"Water deep there?" Jim asked; and Paul shook his head.

"Be able to locate them, probably," he said practically. "Not more than twenty feet, any-

where near the end of the mole." He added: "Wonder if they got the emerald."

"I hope so," Molly confessed. "I—can't help hoping the poor man got it before the end."

Paul laughed. "Well I don't," he commented. "I've cabled the chap in Rome and he's mighty anxious to get it back again. I don't want to keep it now; but wouldn't you rather sell it to him than have it at the bottom of the lake?"

Molly smiled faintly. "You're a thrifty soul, Paul," she commented. "I suppose you're right, though."

"Well, we can have a look for it in the morning," Newbert reminded them; and he added whimsically: "That dog's getting on my nerves. I'm going out and try to quiet him, make friends with him."

"I'll go with you," Nell suggested; rose to come to his side. He looked down at her for a moment, and then he nodded.

"Fine," he agreed. "Fine. We'll both go."

When they were gone, the door closed behind them, Molly smiled up at Paul, smiled at Dill across by the fire. "They've been through a lot together," she said in faint amusement.

Paul chuckled. "I shouldn't wonder if they were going to go through a lot more," he suggested; and Dill cackled, and slapped his hand

upon his knee. And a moment later the dog ceased his grieving; but Nell and Jim did not come back into the house for a considerable time. When they did, Paul and Molly were drowsing comfortably there before the fire, and Dill was frankly asleep, his head back, his jaw fallen slackly. The dog came at Newbert's side, and Newbert's hand was on his neck; and when Jim and Nell sat down together on the seat beyond the fire, the dog curled at Jim's feet and slept. Only the beast whined pitifully in his slumber now and then.

A little after daylight, searching in the fountain, they found the emerald, and later that day others would discover what was left of the madman. But of the man with the amusing cap no no other trace than the cap itself was ever found; and none of them ever knew whether he lived or died.

When Dill announced that it was time for him to be going home to milk his cows, Newbert went with the little man, to telephone his paper; and he took Marco along. Dill offered to take Nell home at the same time, but she shook her head. "Molly may need me," she explained. "I'll stay a little while." And she added softly, looking at Newbert:

"Besides, you'll be coming back again."

The reporter met her eyes, and smiled, and nodded quietly. "Yes," he agreed. "Yes, I'll be coming back to where you are, right along now," he said in a proud and steady tone.

Dill, priming his engine, chuckled soundlessly. "Get in if you're coming, young fellow," he commanded; and Newbert and the dog stepped into the little boat. Newbert sat in the seat beside Dill; Marco crouched on the after deck, his muzzle on the shoulder of his new master. And the boat backed out into the lake and turned and puffed away. As they passed the mole, the dog stirred uneasily, and whined; but when Newbert spoke to him the creature seemed comforted; he dropped and lay still. Behind them the island, the foliage gay in its autumnal coloring, lay smiling in the sun.

"Quite a squall of wind we had last night," said Dill conversationally at last. "Don't know but it was as wild a night as I ever see on the lake for a spell there."

Newbert nodded, his eyes remote. "Yes," he agreed. "Yes, it was bad for a while." About them lay now the mild and gentle waters, all serenely blue; and beyond the lovely hills. He added comfortably: "But it's all right now."